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**Assessment of the Effectiveness of Attendance
Management in order to improve Work Life Balance
within Warrington Borough Council**

Ceri Louise Taylor

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Chester for the degree of Master of Business Administration

CHESTER BUSINESS SCHOOL

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I would like to offer my thanks to my family and friends, for being so patient and understanding and giving me the time and support to complete this work. I would also like to thank my parents, for their encouragement and inspiration to continue to study and reach my goals.

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to ascertain and review the management policies to address absenteeism levels and improve work life balance within Warrington Borough Council. This will be carried out by conducting an appraisal of absenteeism within the public sector, in particular within local government and Warrington BC, to assemble the required data for improving current policies and meet the challenge of reducing absenteeism and increasing staff morale, productivity and efficiency within the Council.

The dissertation describes the methods used to achieve these objectives by:

- Reviewing relevant literature associated with absenteeism and work life balance to inform and provide the framework for the research.
- Defining the methodology adopted to undertake the research in terms of the philosophical stance, approach, strategy and methods for data collection.
- Reporting the findings of the research, demonstrating how they were arrived at through analysis of the collected data and by testing this against relevant theory.

The research question and aims investigated for the purpose of this study are:

Assessment of the Effectiveness of Attendance Management in order to improve Work Life Balance within Warrington Borough Council

- To examine the perceived problem of absenteeism within the public sector, in particular within local government.
- To critically review literature to establish what the concept of work life balance is and what benefit if any it can be to an organisation; in particular in terms of addressing absenteeism.
- To identify and analyse the current strengths and weaknesses of the absence and work life balance policies within Warrington BC.
- To examine the barriers to implementing a new corporate policy for attendance management and work life balance within Warrington BC.

Outcome

To make recommendations for actions to ensure continuous improvement in attendance management and promotion of work life balance.

In order to answer the research question and to achieve the research aims, a phenomenological philosophy is adopted, using a case study strategy and an inductive approach. The data collection methodology has been identified based on the findings of initial research and fact finding internal interviews. The research includes case studies from the private and public sector in order to demonstrate a balanced and authoritative outcome.

Declaration – I declare that this work is my own and all references to any previous work, whether my own or by other authors is fully referenced.

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed: Ceri Louise Taylor

Date: August 2010

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the research

Warrington Borough Council boundary covers an area of approximately 18,179 hectares and a population of over 194,700 residents. Formerly a district council within Cheshire, Warrington became a unitary authority in 1998. The Council employs over 8,965 staff of which 4,771 are based in schools.

The Council's vision is:

“To make Warrington an outstanding town in the north west, with opportunities for all”

Underpinning this vision is a series of values, defining the kind of organisation Warrington BC is and wants to be in the future. These values are: Listening and engaging, Open and transparent, Aiming to be outstanding, Investing in our communities and Investing in our people. The final value *“Investing in our people”* being key to this research project; within the Corporate Plan it is stated: in order to invest in people there is a need for the authority to work as one team, treat colleagues with dignity, fairness and respect, for managers to lead and inspire staff, to involve staff in service planning and finally give staff the opportunity to work flexibly in order to balance their work and family lives.

The six long-term ambitions of the authority are outlined below and again the final ambition *“transforming our organisation to deliver our outcomes”* is of fundamental relevance to this research project.



The council recognises their workforce is vital to continued success and the delivery of value for money and quality services. Staff management, general well-being and development are identified as essential.

Warrington BC, in line with the national public sector, is currently facing many human resources issues. Local Government as a whole has been addressing the issue of single status following the 1998 agreement, which has resulted in a period of change and uncertainty for all employees. This period of change can be seen as positive; as authorities have had to review outdated human resources procedures to ensure equality in working conditions and hours, leading to the development of new policies, often involving a level of employee and union consultation. The period of instability has however, lasted over a decade with a majority of authorities still having to complete job evaluations or negotiate final single status agreements. Warrington BC, as is often the case for organisations during periods of instability and change, has therefore faced issues of higher turnover of staff and absenteeism.

Warrington BC, as highlighted in its Corporate Plan, supports the principle that employees should be able to enjoy an appropriate work life balance and believes that the promotion of more flexible working will have many benefits, for example, enhancing employee motivation, reducing sickness absence levels, increasing performance and productivity and improving recruitment and retention.

The Council is therefore committed to addressing work life balance and providing a wide range of flexible working practices. However, it is recognised that proposed practices will not be appropriate for all posts across the Council, as the delivery of high quality service needs to remain a clear priority. Therefore, in reviewing implementation options for new procedures the needs of the service and the authority as a whole must be met.

The main drivers for this research have been the need to address absenteeism and implement a work life balance policy alongside the rollout of single status in Warrington BC.

1.2. Research question and aims

Assessment of the Effectiveness of Attendance Management in order to improve Work Life Balance within Warrington Borough Council

The research aims being as follows:

- To examine the perceived problem of absenteeism within the public sector in particular within local government.
- To critically review literature to establish what the concept of work life balance is and what benefit if any it can be to an organisation; in particular in terms of addressing absenteeism.
- To identify and analyse the current strengths and weaknesses of the absence and work life balance policies within Warrington BC
- To examine the barriers to implementing a new corporate policy for attendance management and work life balance within Warrington BC.
- To make recommendations for actions to ensure continuous improvement in attendance management and promotion of work life balance within the authority.

The dissertation summarises the approach adopted by the researcher in reviewing attendance management and work life balance in order to fulfil the requirements of the questions and its aims. A critical literature review details and justifies analysis and commentary in conjunction with comparative data from other public sector bodies on work life balance policies and absenteeism. It sets out the findings of the research project prior to drawing the report to a conclusion. An action plan is developed to direct implementation of the recommendations.

The research findings would be of benefit to councils faced with similar issues as terms and conditions are national although negotiated on a local basis. Warrington BC participates in benchmarking exercises and is represented on several regional working groups and it is through these connections that flexibility in employment best practice is shared.

1.3. Justification for the research

The research question is to a degree driven by such factors as professional interest to the researcher, relevance to the researcher's organisation and

current interest in the topic by Central Government, regulatory bodies and the national press.

1.4. Methodology

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key senior officers and the researcher will attend management focus group sessions to gain an in depth analysis and focus the research, in particular the questionnaire, to ensure maximum benefit for the authority.

The questionnaire will be the primary data collection method for this research in order to capture and provide rich qualitative data. A questionnaire will be issued electronically to ascertain absence management practices and flexible arrangements in other organisations. As the research of Eldabi & Irani et al (2002) emphasises, the strength of an organisations perceptions can be appreciated by the level and intensity of feelings amongst its members; therefore a questionnaire will also be issued to a number of employees within Warrington BC.

Data collated on absence within the organisation and national statistics from Employee Absence Management CIPD surveys will provide secondary quantitative data. Whilst a sample of absence management and flexible working procedures obtained on request from other organisations will also assist with the triangulation of data.

1.5. Outline of the chapters

Chapter 1 – this chapter introduces the aims and objectives of the research and the specific question it will answer. It describes the context within which the research is undertaken specifically with regard to Warrington BC. It outlines the dissertation report and the content of each chapter, provides a table of definitions to assist the reader and concludes with a summary of key issues.

Chapter 2 – will provide a review of literature from a wide range of sources to form a basis for analysis and comparison when evaluating current absence management procedures and statistics and inform recommendations for improving procedures and work life balance within Warrington BC.

Chapter 3 – will identify research methods used to collate data to meet research aims and objectives and discuss any limitations and ethical issues.

Chapter 4 – will present findings and supporting evidence and describe how the methodology was applied and demonstrate data analysis.

Chapter 5 – will discuss the links between theories, the research findings and any prior research and knowledge from literature research in chapter two and in doing so critically review the chosen methodology and draw on conclusions relating to the research questions.

Chapter 6 – will culminate in the development of an action plan to make recommendations to ensure continuous improvement in absence management and promotion of work life balance within Warrington BC.

1.6. Definitions

The following definition table is provided to assist the reader in understanding terminology and abbreviations used within the report:

Audit Commission	Independent body responsible for ensuring public monies is spent economically, efficiently and effectively.
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
CPA/CAA	Comprehensive Performance/Area Assessment, mechanisms to assess authorities and monitor progress.
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
DSS	Department of Social Security
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
FTE	Full time equivalent staff measurement
GEO	Government Equalities Office
HR	Human Resources
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
IES	Institute for Employment Studies

JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation completed research into Work Life Balance
LGR	Local Government Reorganisation
NAO	National Audit Office scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament
OHU	Occupational Health Unit
TUC	Trade Union Congress
Unison	Public Sector Union
WBC	Warrington Borough Council

1.7. Summary

The chapter has provided the reader with an understanding of the research problem and question and outlined how the researcher intends to resolve it. Justification for the research has been detailed and research methods briefly outlined. The dissertation will continue as per this outline.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The chapter presents a critical review of the relevant literature for absence management and work life balance to form a basis for analysis and comparison when evaluating current absence management procedures and statistics for Warrington BC and establish what the concept of work life balance is and what benefit if any it can be to organisations; in particular in terms of attendance management.

2.2. Background

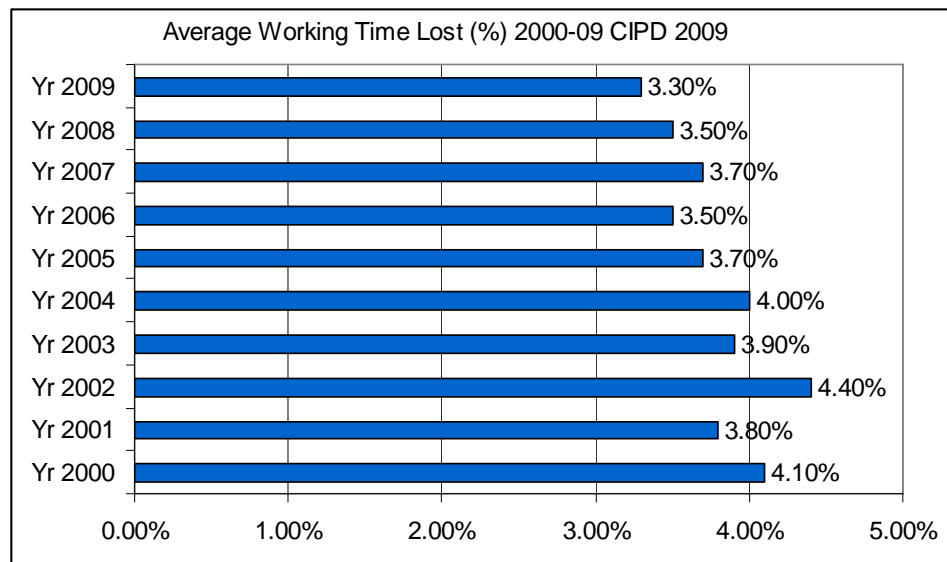
There is extensive literature on absence management and work life balance; especially as absence from work has been widely acknowledged to be a growing problem for organisations in general and for the public sector in particular. Research in general has focused on the causes of absence but in recent years researchers have started to focus on the management of absence.

Research for this project was confined to the following main areas; academic papers, books and publications, press articles, professional journals and specialist websites. This chapter is intended to summarise the key relevant literature, to achieve the objective of the research project.

2.3. Absenteeism

2.3.1. Absence Surveys – Estimated Cost of Absenteeism

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has undertaken annual employee absence surveys in recent years. The 2009 survey of 642 UK employers reported sickness absence costs employers £692 per employee (FTE - full time equivalent) every year and 7.4 working days per FTE per year; representing 3.3% of working time. The CIPD surveys have shown a general trend of improvement in the last ten years with some fluctuation as highlighted in graph 1, in comparison to 3.3% in 2009, in 2000 the average levels of sickness absence stood at 4.1% of working days.



Graph 1- Source CIPD (2009)

A wide range of literature has emerged on the cost of absenteeism highlighting the economic perspective and how absence has been calculated and come to the managerial forefront. Harvey and Nicholson (1993, p841) describe absenteeism as the largest single source of lost productivity in business and industry. The most immediate and substantial cost of absenteeism is direct payment of sick pay to employees; however, the true cost of absence is even greater. As outlined by Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) and Ho (1997); due to the cost of staff cover by agency staff, temporary promotion or overtime and more importantly the indirect costs which are more intangible and difficult to measure such as reduced productivity, lower quality products/services due to less experienced staff replacements and increased demand on employees due to staff shortage all leading to customer dissatisfaction.

In 2007 the Government commissioned a review of the health of Britain's working age group. Dame Carol Black, Director of Health hosted various events in order to collate information to feed into the final report which was published in March 2008. The review sought to establish the foundations for a broad consensus around a new vision for health and work in Britain. There were three principal objectives:

- prevention of illness and promotion of health and well-being;
- early intervention for those who develop health condition; and

- improvement in the health of those out of work so that everyone with the potential to work has the support they need to do so.

The report states around 175 million working days were lost due to sickness in 2006; equivalent to 7 days for each working person in Britain. In addition, around 7% of the working age population was receiving incapacity benefits because of long-term health conditions or disabilities. The economic cost for sickness absence associated with working age ill-health in Britain was reported to be over £100 billion a year; greater than the current annual NHS budget. These figures cause the government significant concern as they represent a substantial cost to the economy, but also as they reflect patterns of poverty and social exclusion which blight entire communities and inhibit the prospects of children and young people.

The report recommends a major Government drive to promote the understanding of the positive relationship between health and work among employers, healthcare professionals and the general public. Proposing the paper-based sick note should be replaced with an electronic fit note, switching the focus to what people can do - “fit for work”, promoting self worth and improved communication between employers and the health service.

2.3.2. Absence Levels within the Public Sector

The 2009 CIPD survey showed the highest absence is in the public sector with an average cost of £784 per employee and on average 9.7 working days lost per FTE representing 4.3% of working days (compared to £906 per FTE and 9.8 working days lost per FTE in 2008). The survey reports the absence levels within local Government as an average cost of £794 per employee and on average 10.7 working days lost per FTE representing 4.7% of working days (compared to 10.1% working days lost per FTE in 2008). The largest absence level within the public sector continues to be within the Health Service with a reported level in 2009 of 11.0 working days lost and a cost of £952 per FTE. This increasing trend within the public sector has led to a

number of articles in newspapers and journals and pressure on the Government to address absence management.

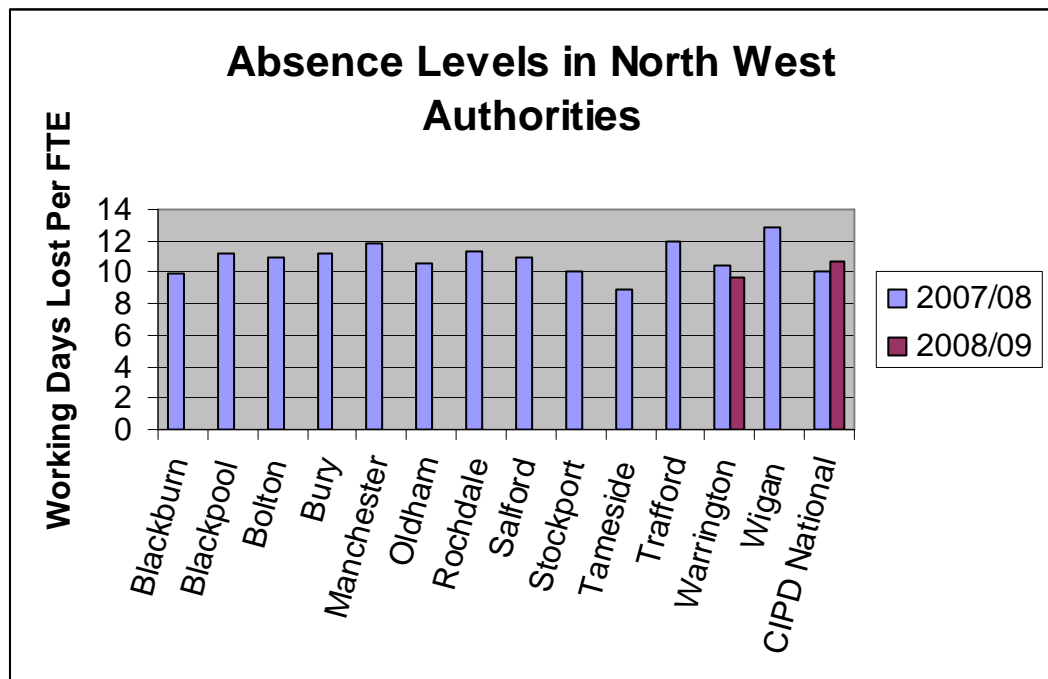
The Ministerial Task Force on Health, Safety and Productivity and the Cabinet Office produced a joint report on Managing Sickness Absence in the Public Sector in 2004. The Government acknowledged the need to introduce more rigorous enforcement of existing measures as well as a new scheme to address the problem of absence management.

“The public sector has higher recorded long-term (certificated) absence rate than the private sector – as one might expect given the more generous entitlement to occupational sick pay for long absences.”(HSE, 2004)

The Ministerial Task Force Report 2005 stated the days lost to sickness in the public sector are estimated to cost Treasury over £4 billion a year and absence in local authorities alone to cost £900 million a year; money which should be available for service delivery. The TUC argue whilst the public sector does have more overall sickness absence than the private sector this is concentrated in long-term absence and is consistent with statistics for similar size organisations. When it comes to the short-term absence, which has been the main target for improved management, the public sector’s record is actually better than the private sector and international record. (Economic and Social Affairs - Jan 2005). Citing a recent Zijlstra and Rook report as evidence; stating in Britain a lower proportion of working time was lost to short-term absence than in any other country except Denmark, and only Austria, Germany and Ireland lost a lower proportion of working time to long-term absence.

The trend of Local Government absence levels in the North West is highlighted in graph 2. The reported levels of absenteeism within Warrington BC in 2007-08 of 10.41 working days lost per FTE; is in line with the general trend of absence in the North West and slightly above the national local government average of 10.1 working days lost per FTE in 2008. The 2008/09 absence level of 9.72 working days lost per FTE

highlights an improvement compared with an increase in the national average to 10.7 working days lost per FTE in 2009.



Graph 2 – Source Greater Manchester Association Facts, Figures and Finance 2007/08

Work Ministers have emphasised the need to make sure the approach to absence management is consistent across the public sector. In recent years, pressure has been placed on public services to increase efficiency and public accountability under the umbrella of new public management. The NAO has published reports on the management of sickness absence as part of their ongoing scrutiny of public spending. The 2005 report on Current Thinking for Managing Attendance; research supported by the IES concluded that the most successful attendance management policies combine approaches that both prevent illegitimate absence, provide support to those legitimately absent and promote well-being or remove barriers to attending work.

More recently, the productivity work stream of the Gershon Efficiency agenda and public sector spending review has meant that the loss of potential productivity time is coming under increased scrutiny by local authorities. This has resulted in the setting of significant long-term targets of up to 30% reduction or 7 days per FTE in terms of absence management in Authority annual efficiency statements.

2.3.3. Causes of Absenteeism

The most logical approach to reducing employee absence is to identify the specific causes of absence and attempt to understand and tackle these at source but as outlined in the 2005 NAO review this is not straightforward. Extensive research has occurred into absenteeism with the following being identified as some of the key causes: high workload due to poor team structure, lack of resources/training, poor management direction, lack of communication, fear of organisational change, low job satisfaction and low employee morale. Rhodes and Steers (1990) identifying 209 variables which effect absenteeism, concluding it was impossible to draw conclusions on principal causes with any degree of certainty.

The general health and lifestyle of employees and the link to attendance at work has been a popular research topic; with strong links identified between lack of exercise, smoking and excessive alcohol use and absence. Hayday (2006) states there is a strong link between those who consistently work more than contracted hours and both psychological and physical sickness levels; as employees become burnt out and often demoralised. Allegro and Veerman (1990) refer to white, grey and black absenteeism. Absence can be a way of avoiding conflict at work, high workload or aspects of work that are emotionally demanding (e.g. social care), inherently unpleasant (e.g. waste service) or with high risk of injury (e.g. from members of the public or equipment). Career satisfaction is one of the most powerful predictors of absence behaviour; with absence being higher among those expressing dissatisfaction especially during periods of uncertainty and change within an organisation (Saunders 2003, Mc Hugh 2001). Absence statistics also confirm that the age, gender and the level of an individual within an organisation is associated with attendance. The NAO review (2005) claims younger staff, females and those in junior grades; have been found to have higher absence rates, with family responsibilities being a critical factor for female absence.

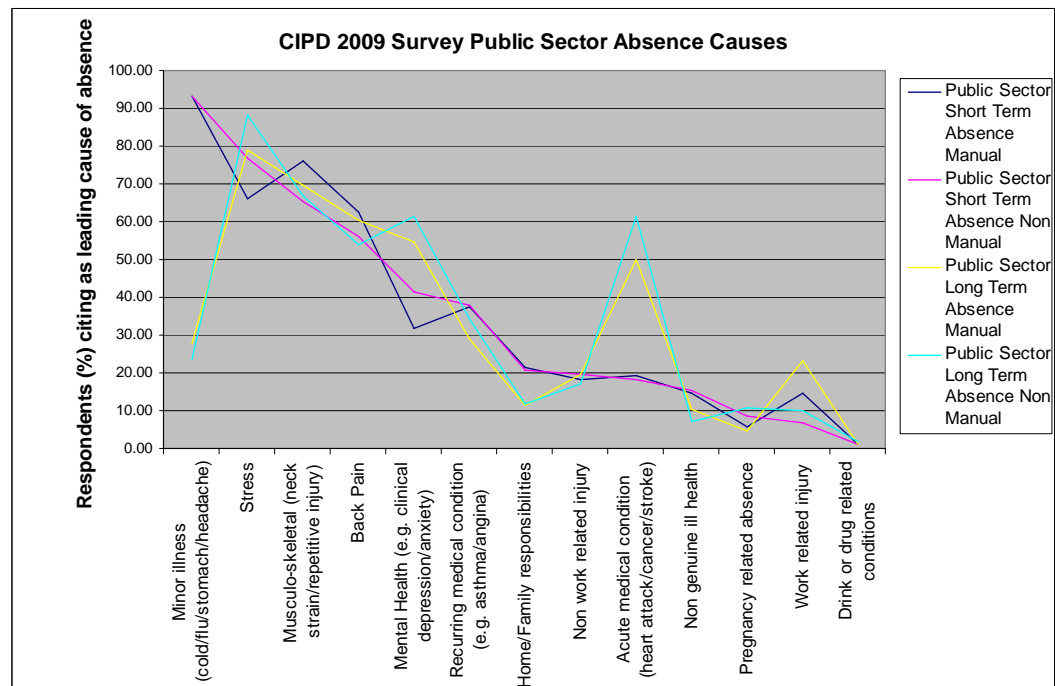
The following model developed by IES categories causes of absence into four distinct clusters:

<p>Health and Lifestyle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Genuine illness/Poor Health ■ Smoking ■ Excessive Use of Alcohol ■ Lack of Exercise ■ Body Weight 	<p>Workplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Working Patterns ■ Health and Safety Concerns ■ Travel Times ■ Excessive Hours
<p>Attitude and Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Job Satisfaction ■ Career Satisfaction ■ Intention to Leave ■ Organisational Commitment ■ Stress ■ Absence ‘culture’ <p>Table 2: source: IES www.ieshr.co.uk</p>	<p>Domestic and Kinship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gender ■ Number of Children under 16 ■ Lack of Flexible Working Arrangements

A certain level of absence is an unavoidable feature of working life; however according to the CBI 2006 review employers believe that 12% of absence is non genuine. Similarly, the 2009 CIPD survey states on average employers believe about 16% of absence is not genuine. It is convenient to absolve the employing organisation of any responsibility for employee absence; however, it is important to acknowledge that in some cases the root cause of illness/injury may be embedded in organisational culture, structures and practices. As emphasised by Saratoga (1998) high employee absence is a clear indicator of dissatisfaction within an organisation.

Minor illness such as cold, flu, stomach or head aches are the most significant cause of short-term absence; this is consistent across sectors and

for manual and non manual workers. The 2009 CIPD survey identified the other main causes of short-term absence as: back pain, musculo-skeletal injuries, home and family responsibilities and stress. There is little difference between the top causes of long-term absence with back pain, musculo-skeletal injuries and stress remaining in the top five joined by acute medical conditions (e.g. heart attacks, stroke or cancer) and mental health. Graph 3 highlights the main causes of absence within the public sector.



Graph 3 – Source CIPD (2009)

Stress is a main cause of long-term absence in the public sector for both manual and non-manual workers; this is in line with the trend in other sectors where stress is rated as one of the main causes for non manual workers. However, the CIPD survey highlights the high stress level within the public sector with a 72% respondent rating compared with 53% in manufacturing and 46% in the private sector. Back pain, acute medical conditions and musculo-skeletal injuries are also rated highly as causes for manual and non-manual workers long-term absence. The view of the TUC, recorded in Economic and Social Affairs (Jan 2005), is the level of absence due to stress has increased in the public sector due to the level of organisational change as a result of efficiency reviews and the suite of new initiatives including the Gershon efficiency, Comprehensive Performance/Area Assessments (CPA, CAA), Local Government

Re-organisation (LGR), the single status agenda and Public Sector Spending Reviews.

The 2009 CIPD survey ranked the main causes of work related stress as workload, management style and organisational change. In 2009 the Health and Safety Executive estimated that work-related stress cost UK employers at least £500m a year. Organisations are taking the following actions to identify stress: risk assessments, employee surveys and managerial training and attempt to manage through measures such as Occupational Health and Flexible working policies.

Absenteeism may also be a result of balancing commitments outside of work such as children or elderly parents and as Sargent (1990) states employees may be finding it difficult to cope resulting in genuine stress illness or if not supported by management may plead sickness rather than explain the issues preventing attendance at work. A number of recent articles including Morris (2009) article in *Employment Studies* have highlighted increase in work related stress impacting domestic lifestyle with pressure of recession, redundancy, reductions in pay or working hours. The 2009 CIPD survey highlights the variation in response with 11% of organisations stating concern over job security had increased absence levels and 16% stating concern over job security had led to a reduction in absence; with the reduction in the private sector reported to be 20% compared to 7% in the public sector. Whilst, four in ten employers stated the recession had increased their focus on absence management policy.

2.3.4. Management of Absence

The importance of management of absence when organisations are being pressurised to improve performance and achieve change; has been highlighted by several researchers including Coram & Burnes (2001) and Hayday (2006). Absence problems are likely to adversely affect the ability of the organisation to cope effectively with organisational change. In the public sector absence is regarded as one of the most challenging tasks by almost a

third of HR professionals according to the 2003 Local Government Employers survey.

A range of approaches towards absence management, have been documented in academic and practitioner reports. Verification of these approaches and studies however is limited, as the focus of research has concentrated on extent of use rather than effectiveness of policies. Spurgeon (2002) states current good practice is “consensus based rather than evidenced based”. Hayday (2006) states the key elements of a good absence management policy are: organisational culture of attendance, clarity of roles and clarity of procedures. A credible and successful policy needs to be understood and communicated throughout the organisation and applied consistently and fairly. Without a clear defined policy and strong managerial commitment and direction it is possible to have a culture where absence is accepted as uncontrollable or viewed as an entitlement. The success or failure of an absence policy within an organisation lies in the hands of direct line managers who may be ambivalent about this responsibility and therefore need clear guidelines for policies, record keeping and trigger points as well as training and access to support from HR professionals in order to confidently implement procedures consistently with a sensitive manner and discretion.

Traditionally, both research and policies focused on absence management, particularly short-term absence, resulting in a disciplinary approach and concentration being on how to deal with un-genuine absence. Sargent (1989) refers to the problem of short-term absence as “the British disease” stating that the average working person is away for an extra two weeks due to sickness on top of leave entitlement. He refers to the trend of seasonal absence and absence on particularly days such as prior to or following bank holidays or weekends. The 2009 CIPD survey highlights several short-term absence management approaches: the most commonly used being - return to work interviews, maintaining and monitoring of absence data with trigger points for attendance reviews and regular reporting to senior management. The disciplinary procedures for unacceptable levels of absence and restriction in sick pay are more likely to be used in the manufacturing,

production and private sector with the public sector taking what is viewed to be a softer approach focusing on prevention through flexible working policies and staff recognition or reward packages. The survey also states three quarters of public sector organisations compared to a quarter of private employers, provide employees with access to occupational health; recognising the importance of early intervention and referral in order to offer support and counselling with the hope of prevention of long-term absence. The level of importance placed on preventative measures is reported by Morris (2009) to have increased in recent years with schemes such as health surveillance with more companies encouraging on site visits by doctors and nurses and the use of nurse led absence management systems where employees speak to medical staff when reporting absence.

The use of positive incentives has raised numerous debates, Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) note a degree of scepticism as to the merits and effectiveness of attendance bonuses frequently used in the private sector; stating employees should not receive additional income to attend work and once the threshold for benefit is breached any incentive effect is lost. They also argue low value loyalty schemes offer little incentive; however it has been widely reported in the press that employers such as Royal Mail, HBOS and AA distribute £3 to £4 billion worth of vouchers every year to combat absenteeism. Jacobsen (1989) highlights the health and safety risks of introducing a culture of genuine ill, being forced into work for reward. Chough and Kleiner (2003) argue reward based approaches tend to motivate employees with good attendance records but have little impact on chronic absentees. However, Pollitt (2004) emphasises the success of the Tesco pilot scheme offering positive incentives of shopping vouchers and up to three extra paid days leave for a good attendance record. However, the Tesco policy is balanced with a stick approach of banning sick pay for the first three days of any illness and stricter sick note requirements. Markham, Dow Scott and McKee (2002) claim personal recognition reward programmes and senior managerial acknowledgement of good attendance can reduce absenteeism and are low cost options with significant gains. A new approach adopted in the private sector has been “duvet days”, where employees are able to take annual leave on short notice; the positive benefits have been

documented in the press as highlighted by the following quote from the Sunday Times on 8th July 2007:

“rewarding employees with an occasional lie in – can cut staff turnover and boost profits.”

However, successful implementation relies upon an employer’s ability to cope with short notice absence. Whilst recognising the positive and negative actions available to organisations in the management of absence, the issue of legal compliance, consistency and management training are also vital factors in the implementation of any of these approaches.

Evaluation of DSS data showed a quarter of 4.4 million workers who received statutory sick pay in 1999, were absent from work for more than 5 weeks and a tenth for more than 13 weeks. (Cunningham & James 2000) Pollitt (2004) states while 89% of absences are short-term but long-term absence accounts for 56% of days lost and up to 70% of costs. This has resulted in the need for organisations to fundamentally review absence management practices. The most effective approaches to managing long-term absence according to the 2009 CIPD survey are: occupational health involvement, rehabilitation programmes, flexible working arrangements which include temporary or permanent changes to working patterns or working environment to encourage employees to return to work or work from home. A move towards what has been termed “Attendance Management”. Employer survey respondents identified restriction in sick pay as an effective intervention, highlighting the trend of return to work when the period of sick pay ended or reduced. However, as is the case with management of short-term absence it is hard to manage long-term absence by “stick” due to the inability of management to determine cases of genuine absence. Sue Hayday (2006) argues absence policies need to discriminate between absence that is unavoidable due to illness and employees whose health is affected by controllable factors for example lack of exercise, drinking or smoking where the employer can have some influence and offer support. According to the British Health Foundation, physical activity or employee well-being programmes reduce absenteeism by up to 20 per cent.

Return to work interviews provide an essential opportunity for communication; to ensure the employee is feeling valued, to bring them up to speed with any important developments or current workload and for the line manager to gain insight into any underlying work, health or family issue at the root of absence and provide any assistance needed. A trigger mechanism is a useful tool to highlight recurrent short-term absence and the need for an attendance review meeting, providing line managers with the opportunity for addressing any patterns in absence and if required occupational health support or the start of disciplinary procedures.

The focus on health and well-being and attendance management has been firmly on the political agenda following the Choosing Health, White Paper in 2004 and the Government Work and Well-being Strategy launched in 2005. A number of organisations have introduced health initiatives to address absenteeism such as: corporate health centres or reduced rates at local gyms, nutrition programmes and healthy on site catering, health screening and health care packages. Dr John Cooper, Head of Corporate Health, Unilever and Dean Frost, Health Adviser at Kelloggs state the cost to the organisation of introducing a wellbeing programme have been more than met by savings from a reduction in absenteeism. (Symposium Conference: 2006). The underlying assumption within this line of argument being organisational health is heavily dependent upon the health and well being of employees. (Mc Hugh: 2001).

Organisational controls which aim to reduce absenteeism as highlighted above can be powerful tools but in the main tend to focus on short-term absence; the work life balance approach goes a step further to address employee morale and well-being, stress, family pressures and other causes of long-term absence. Dalton and Todor (1993, p207) state liberal sick leave policies lead to high absenteeism and argue organisations can drastically reduce the level of employee absenteeism by adopting policies, which deter, not encourage, absenteeism. The work life balance framework by allowing employees to balance their need to work with other commitments such as child care, caring for a relative, personal development or their own physical well-being is regarded as a positive attendance management tool to bring

about organisational change whilst ensuring continuity of service delivery. The NAO report (2006) concludes the most successful attendance policies combine approaches that prevent illegitimate absence, provide support to those legitimately absent and promote well-being within the workplace.

2.4. Work Life Balance

2.4.1. Concept of Work Life Balance

It was identified that there has been a great deal written about the concept of work life balance and there is a wide range of interpretation as to what it can offer an organisation and its employees.

The term “work life balance” has only recently been widely used and prior to the emergence of the concept work life balance the majority of research conducted centred on the social policy viewpoint using the term “Family Friendly” but in fact did not confine itself to only those with families. This research was conducted by such groups as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Trade Union Congress (TUC), Government Policy Unit and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Research has shown there is no single definition of “work life balance” and as a concept; employers and employees define it differently. For the purpose of this research the following definition given by the DTI (2001) is a useful foundation:

“Work life balance is about adjusting working patterns. Regardless of age, race or gender, everyone can find a rhythm to help them combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations”

In establishing the definition of work life balance it is important to understand the history between employer and employee and the need for flexibility within the workplace. Traditionally, Hall and Torrington (1998) state the employer was very much the master deciding working conditions and hours driven by the desire for profit and maintaining the class structure. The result being flexibility at this time for the employee was to work or not to work; with no real option as work was required for survival. Handy

(1989) states more and more requests for change in the working week emerged in the 1980's and he defined this challenge as "upside-down thinking" as organisations believed it was the "unreasonable" employees forcing change.

The last few decades have therefore seen major changes in the labour market and have seen the participation of females in the workplace increase considerably. Marchington and Wilkinson (2005) stating in 1960 only 33% of workforce was female, increasing to 45% by 2001 and they predict with the shift from manufacturing to service industries this percentage could soon be equal. Baines (1995) argues the increase in female workforce changed the balance and requirements of employees leading to demands for more flexibility and changes in the pattern of working hours. This is particularly relevant in the public sector due to the high percentage of female employees especially within service areas such as Social Care and Education. Baines (1995) discusses the use of flexi time and contrasts its benefits with employees having a means of control over their working day and improving the quality of working life. Therefore, the "work life balance" concept was clearly emerging in the 1990's, to address quality of life and well-being.

The JRF study in 2002 sought to research the change in social requirements of employees and how they were attempting to create a balance in their overall lives. The 2002 CIPD survey reported 76% of parents felt employers did not provide enough support to working parents and 81% would chose flexible working if it were available.

The issue of work life balance became widely researched with numerous journals and press articles. In September 2002 People Management launched "The Guide to Work Life Balance" stating three quarters of HR professionals believed flexible working should be available to all but two thirds believed it would have a negative impact for an employee's promotional prospects. It seems the relationship between employer and employee has to some extent turned full circle with employees starting to define when they want to work rather than strict dictated hours.

It is clear the two terms “work life balance” and “family friendly” became interchangeable this decade. The JRF study (2002) stating work life balance is merely a re-baptism of family-friendly policies. However, clearly the scope of work life balance policies is much wider as these policies are intended to offer all employees the opportunity to address their work/home life balance.

The issue of work life balance has been well publicised in the press particularly as the political debate has developed. For example Renshaw in her article in the Times (23/2/05) states staff want flexi-time and can plan for a better life and legally ask employers for one. Lee Lixenberg’s article in the Management Journal for Local Authority Business (01.05.08) highlights employees are working for a better life as employers enable staff to work more flexibly leading to higher levels of motivation, health and productivity. Graham Snowdon’s review in The Guardian (19/12/2009) “How work changed in the noughties” outlined the number of employers offering flexible working policies had almost doubled in the last decade but in reality the statistics within recent Work Foundation research show under a quarter of employees are working differently with only 2% working mainly from home and 14% operating from multiple locations. The article states the number of women working has increased by 1.24 million over the decade and almost half are in part time jobs quoting Professor Cooper as stating: *“its women who apply for flexible working, men think they’ll be perceived by their employers as not being committed”*.

The article also states although the UK has a reputation for a long hours culture; average weekly working hours have fallen in the last decade from 37.9 hours in 2000 to 36.8 hours in 2009 based on Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey and only 19.1% of UK employees work more than 45 hours a week. However, Cooper argues UK employees have the longest working hours in the development world.

The CMI has published a number of research reports looking at the quality of managers’ working lives since 1997. Over the last decade, organisations have come under increasing pressure to improve their competitiveness, productivity and efficiency and use managerial assets more intensively.

Cooper and Worrall (CMI: 2007) state in a period of change, work intensification and job insecurity ensuring employee well-being and motivation is no easy task. The 2007 report states 89% of managers regularly work over their contracted hours impacting on their health and home life. Where work life health benefits were offered the report provides evidence to show absence levels are lowered and evidence of some impact if absence management policies are in place. The survey demonstrates that ill health or poor well-being results in low motivation and productivity. The 2008 Quality of Working Life survey reported 88% of local government workers worked more than their contracted hours this figure had barely changed despite flexible working policies since the reported figure of 91% in 2000. The 2008 survey compares UK and Australian organisations with 53.9% of UK managers reporting commitment to promote well-being compared with 65.2% in Australia, but existence of policies for stress management and absence were significantly more pronounced in the UK 76.1% to 40.8% in Australia. Public Sector absence is reported as high in both countries but attitudes to absence in the UK were reported to be substantially less positive than in Australia.

2.4.2. Government involvement in Work Life Balance

The government commissioned a number of surveys in recent years into flexible working and the concept of work life balance with the aim of raising awareness of the business benefits of helping employees create a better balance between work and home life. The Work Life Balance Challenge Fund was key to the Government campaign launched in March 2000 and campaign information highlighted the value for organisations of using work life balance policies to address absence rates and workforce morale. The Minister of State for Employment Relations, Alan Johnson stating:

“Everyone benefits from good practice in work life balance.”

The Industrial Society conducted a Managing Attendance Survey (July 2001) that showed “flexible working patterns” were clearly linked to reducing absence. Similarly, the DTI (2001) argued that if successfully implemented work life balance policies: offer better customer services, improve productivity and performance, increasing morale commitment and

loyalty, resulting in a better rate of recruitment and retention, flexibility in staff attitude and ability to deal with change and lower absenteeism. In 2002 the DTI introduced a standard framework for work life balance for organisations to complete self assessments and outlined the following flexible working options: home working, shift/rota patterns for teams, job sharing, career breaks, voluntary reduced hours, compressed hours and simplified flexi time arrangements.

The work life balance framework produced many benefits but the culture of working long hours remains in Britain. This argument has been supported by a number of researchers in the JRF review (2002) and newspaper articles highlighting the limitation to the benefits in Britain compared with other European countries like Netherlands, Norway and Sweden due to working culture. As emphasised in an article in the Telegraph (25/08/06) the researcher Sarah Womack states “Family life is threatened by Britain’s ‘workaholic’ culture” it is reported that Britain has the longest working hours in Europe with 1 in 5 full time employees working more than 48 hours a week.

The Audit Commission survey 2002 highlighted, the more flexibility employers could offer the better chance for staff recruitment, retention and low absence levels however consistency of approach would prove vital. A more consistent approach was brought in by the Flexible Working Regulation, which became a legal requirement from April 2003. Mothers and fathers of children under six, or of disabled children under eighteen, have the right to apply to work flexibly, the hours that best suit them, on the days they want and at the place of their choice. Employers have a duty to consider requests seriously and refuse only where a clear business reason is provided. This legislation in terms of work life balance however was limited as it excludes those without family. The implementation of the 2006 Work and Families Act from April 2007 increased the maternity and adoption pay from six to nine months, introducing a new right of up to 26 weeks additional paternity leave some of which could be paid if the mother returns to work and extending the right to request flexible working to carers of adults.

Other legislation relevant to absenteeism and work life balance policies identified during the research include:

- Disability – employer is required to make reasonable adjustments to retain an employee who becomes disabled or when recruiting disabled employees. .
- Part time working – no automatic right but employers need to take care to ensure compliance with discrimination legislation.
- Time off to care for dependants – all employees have the right to take reasonable time off work to deal with an emergency.
- Working time regulations – regulations give employees entitlement to four weeks paid holiday a year, rest times including 20mins statutory for lunch break and the ceiling of 48 working hours a week that an employee can be required to work.

Whilst, the new legislation has caught many unaware; a survey completed by CIPD and KPMG in 2006 found 51% of employers surveyed considered themselves prepared for these new provisions and organisations anticipated difficulties coping with the revisions in maternity and paternity rights, but there was a more positive attitude towards extending flexible working rights. A SMART human logistics (2007) report states businesses have been quietly and resolutely implementing widespread work life balance policies; for example Sainsbury's, Nestle, Sony, Virgin Atlantic, Central Government departments and the NHS. The report states due to the fact labour frequently accounts for 80% or more of a company's controllable costs, you can see why the concept of flexible working has been seen as so attractive.

A report from the Works Foundation commissioned by UNISON , the public service union in 2006, however, concludes that public sector employers may “talk the talk” on work life balance but in practice have limited commitment to changing standard working patterns. The researcher Laura Williams states:

“Work life balance is one of those areas where public sector organisations claim to be most progressive but what this study reveals is a classic rhetoric reality gap.”

However, the Work Foundation Report 2007 states work life balance is about an individual controlling where, when and how they work and 66% of organisations surveyed found flexible working when introduced reduced absence. A number of case studies are presented to evidence benefits, including the following:

- BT - reduction in absence to 3.1%, an increase in productivity of 31% and estimated £52m savings in overhead costs
- Bristol City Council – increase in quality of customer service and longer opening hours, greater productivity, customer satisfaction and improved absence management, recruitment and retention.

David Cameron, is quoted in the Telegraph (15/6/2007) to have pledged to ensure that the public sector became a world leader in providing flexible working opportunities. A GEO review was instigated in October 2009 to improve understanding of the flexible working transition within the recession in order to sustain in the long-term. A number of research articles have recently focused on the impact of the recession on work life balance policies, for example Sandra Haurant has written articles in the Guardian outlining the benefits of a “flex up and down workforce”. However, the negative impact on absenteeism and stress and employee reluctance due to fear of job insecurity have also been highlighted by researchers, including an article in Personnel Today by Kat Baker (2009). A 2010 review by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) Managing Tomorrow’s People states the new Government promises to extend the right to request flexible working and companies that can adapt to the growing flexible working culture will be best placed to sustain morale and retain employees. Flexible working arrangements were rated in the PWC survey as the most important benefit above a performance related bonus.

2.5. Summary

The research into absenteeism and work life balance within Warrington BC will need to be limited due to time constraints and will address the specific aims of the project; focusing on absence management and proposed solutions to reduce absence levels around the concept of work life balance; not the causes of absenteeism.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter defines the methodology adopted to undertake the research; justifies the philosophical perspective, approach and strategy adopted in addressing the research aims and objectives and outlines why these were chosen. Several different methods are commonly used in business and management project work and as Jankowicz (2005) states the chosen method will be dependent upon the nature and scope of subject area, data sources available, the purpose and control exercised by the researcher in gathering data and the assumptions made during analysis. In making a decision on methods of research for this study those outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003); Silverman (1993), Denscombe (1998); Holliday (2002); Jankowicz (2005) and Gill and Johnson (2002) have been considered. The chapter also details the methods of data collection utilised and considers the benefits and limitations of each before concluding with a review of ethical issues in terms of credibility, validity and reliability of research data.

3.2. Methodological considerations

The philosophy utilised for the purpose of this research is *phenomenological subjective* one rather than a positive objective one with primarily an *inductive* research approach.

3.2.1. Justification for the selected paradigm and methodology

The research subject requires an approach that allows for observation and explanation and therefore the most appropriate is a phenomenological subjective one due to the fact that employee absence and work life balance can be classed as a social phenomena and an interpretive researcher seeks to understand motives, actions and intentions to gain wider insight not generalisation from experience.

Saunders et al (2003) emphasised that phenomenology is characterised by focus on the meaning that research subjects have attached to social phenomena, where the researcher tries to understand what is happening and why. Gill and Johnson (2002) theorise that the phenomenological philosophy is a study of how things appear or personal experiences. Remenyi et al (1998) endorses this by stating the need to discover:

“The details of the situation in order to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them.”

The research area is very intricate, it cannot be characterised through quantitative data and statistical data alone. The researcher will need to utilise softer, qualitative data in order to gain an insight to personal perceptions and analysis of social interaction through various communication mechanisms. It is anticipated the research findings are unlikely to lead to the generalisations that are characteristic of a positivist research philosophy.

In making this decision, it is acknowledged, however, that as defined by Easterby Smith et al (2002) there is no sharp division between a positivist and phenomenological approach and that elements of both approaches do at times overlap.

Absence Management and work life balance are concepts not achieved or perceived in the same way by individuals. It is therefore important that the approach adopted allows for the breadth of research required to enable informed decision-making following research.

Easterby Smith et al (2002) identify the following reasons why the research approach adopted is vital:

- To enable a more informed decision to be made about research design
- To focus the mind on research methods that will work
- To assist in adapting research methods to provide for constraints

A deductive approach is usually linked with the positivist philosophy and involves the development and testing of theory. Saunders et al (2003) suggest a deductive approach is “*moving from theory to data*” and the extent to which the researcher is clear about the theory at the start of research will determine the research approach adopted. An inductive approach owes more to interpretation, as data will be collected and data analysis will formulate the theory.

To gain the understanding of how an employee achieves work life balance and employer absence managerial requirements it would be inappropriate to follow a purely deductive approach, as the research area demands a greater understanding of the “softer qualitative issues” through various data collection methods. Therefore an inductive approach will be adopted which allows for this span of research and is more commonly associated with the formulation of a phenomenological philosophy.

3.2.2. Rejected methods

A positivism approach researcher assumes the role of an objective analyst; according to Remenyi et al (1998:33):

“The researcher should be independent of the research and neither affect nor be affected by it”.

Silverman (1997) states that by adopting a purely positivist approach based on quantitative data, the social and cultural aspects of the research area may be neglected. Therefore, a positivist approach is viewed not to be appropriate for this research, as the researcher would be affected by any proposed changes of the research and is not independent of the statistical data.

Gill and Johnson (2002) emphasise the principles of positivism result in a highly structured methodology with an emphasis on quantifiable observations that lend themselves to statistical analysis. As emphasised above the research subject demands a greater knowledge of the “softer qualitative issues” and the use of a variety of methods to collect data therefore an inductive research approach is the preferred option. However, an element of deductive approach to research will apply to the statistical

analysis of quantitative absence data and the cost benefit analysis of work life balance proposals.

3.3. Research Strategy

Whilst much has been written on a single approach to research by many authors including Gill and Johnson (2002) and Easterby-Smith et al (2002) it is also acknowledged that no approach is more effective than another. Jankowicz (2005) states the selected method will be dependent upon the nature and scope of the research topic, data sources, the purpose of the researcher, the amount of control exerted in obtaining data and finally the assumptions made during analysis.

3.3.1. Justification of Research Strategy

The Case Study Strategy involves research using multiple sources of evidence, exploration of existing data, challenging of existing theory and a well-structured case study can provide a new source of hypotheses. This strategy is therefore viewed to be the most supportive of the methodological research approach to be adopted as it allows for various perceptions to be explored. An important argument for selecting this strategy is presented by Weerd-Nederhof (2001) as rather than attempting to control behavioural events this strategy allows for documentation of the research and observation of inter relations as they happen.

Saunders et al (2003) state the case study strategy has considerable ability to generate answers to the “why”, “what” and “how” questions. Yin (2002) states a case study research strategy has a distinct advantage over other research strategies, due to the “how” or “why” question that is posed to inquire about a set of contemporary events over which the investigator has had little or no control. Case study strategy will involve at least four stages of work listed by Bennett (1986) as follows:

- Determining the present situation
- Gathering information about the background to the present situation

- Gathering more specific data to test alternative hypotheses about important factors in the present situation
- Presenting recommendations for action, and where you have the time and power to influence events, evaluate the outcomes of these recommendations after implementation.

The purpose of data gathering when adopting a case study strategy is not to sample different departments or organisations with the aim of generalisation of findings as you would do in a survey but to achieve representation through replication; by comparison of practices in departments or different organisations, exploring various stances to the research area and the different variables involved. The case study is an attempt to be comprehensive, engaging in the full richness of a variety of organisational events and issues. However, this does leave the researcher vulnerable to mass information overload and the risk of generalisation or being open to real situation influence more than the survey and experimental strategy. Yin (2002) emphasises the need to be clear from the start about the level at which you are conducting the case study, Hartley (1994) emphasises the need for a particular theoretical stance to be stated at the outset and Wells (1994) argues case study research methods without a theoretical framework can lead to a descriptive analysis without considering the wider picture and meaning.

This approach is clearly defined by Jankowicz (2005) as a method of checking information from different sources to enable triangulation to take place. Saunders et al (2003) describe a “mixed and matched” approach having advantages in that it covers different areas of research within one study. A researcher can use an interview as a basis to develop the framework for a questionnaire and vice versa. Silverman’s (1997) definition of triangulation “*using several methods to reveal multiple aspects of a single empirical reality*” suit this research on work life balance and absence management; where if the policy is to be successfully implemented, it needs to take into account varied employee perceptions and expectations, not be imposed based on managerial requirements.

3.3.2. Rejected Strategies

Experimental and survey research are viewed to be classical forms of analysis associated with a deductive approach. A survey approach being the direction of questions at a relatively large group, representative of the larger population, in order to explore issues largely in the present time. Whilst, the experimental method owes much to natural sciences but involves typically allocation of samples of individuals from known populations to different experimental conditions; the approach can be used successfully to measure the impact of change. Punch (2001) asserts the experimental and survey research strategies are a preferred approach for collection of quantitative data in order to test a defined theoretical hypothesis. As a phenomenological philosophy and inductive approach have been selected for the purpose of this research, these strategies are viewed to be incompatible.

Grounded theory strategy involves “theory building” Saunders et al (2003). Hussey and Hussey (1997) identify this strategy as an inductive/deductive approach. As ground theory strategy is considered to be very time consuming it has not been adopted as the preferred strategy for this research. However, an element will be applied as theory generated from initial data analysis will continually be reviewed and built upon during the period of research.

Ethnography strategy is also embedded in the inductive approach and is used to interpret the social world that the research subjects inhabit and is viewed by Mc Neill (1990) to be very appropriate when researching an organisational culture. Saunders et al (2003) state this research strategy is very time consuming and therefore is also suited to a research project to be completed over an extended time period. The research process needs to be flexible and responsive to change, with the researcher constantly developing new patterns of thought often through participant observation.

Similarly, action research strategy focuses on a close collaboration between practitioners and researchers; as emphasised by Zuber-Skerritt (1996) the researcher is part of the organisation within which the research and change process is taking place. The strengths of action research strategy are

management of change; the recognition that time needs to be devoted to fact-finding and analysis, monitoring and evaluation throughout the research process. Schein (1995) emphasises the importance of employee involvement throughout this process; as employees are more likely to implement change they have helped to create and where the need for change comes from within the organisation. Marsick and Watkins (1997) note action research strategy therefore differs from other forms of research due to its explicit focus on action, in particular promoting change within the organisation. The final evaluation stage in action research strategy after the life of the study is considered as important to the researcher as data collection and monitoring as it will be fundamental to successful implementation and management of change throughout the organisation or the development of theory and transfer of knowledge to be used as a basis for future projects. If this research project were to be over a longer period and involve a review of the implementation of policy changes to address work life balance; an action research strategy would have been the most appropriate strategy to be adopted.

3.4. Research procedures

3.4.1. Participant Observation

Participant observation of any type requires a disciplined approach and the possibility of the “*observer effect*”, where the observed act differs from the norm because they are conscious of being observed must be acknowledged. Gill and Johnson (2002) categorise participant observers in four ways. These are: Complete participants, Complete observers, Observers as participants, Participant as observer. The role adopted for this research study is a participant observer, as subjects are aware of the purpose of the researcher, through team briefings and membership on management working groups. Silverman (1993) emphasises the importance of utilising participant observation to share experiences and gain insight to the root of the organisation.

There are clear advantages to practitioner research such as ease of access to research data, knowledge of organisation, an understanding of the culture

and negotiation ability with key participants. All of these were acknowledged as valuable by the Director of Corporate Services in agreeing to completion of the research study. However, there are also significant disadvantages that need to be considered and addressed:

- Knowledge of the Organisation – whilst acknowledged as an advantage it also means the researcher might have preconceived conceptions. This has been considered but counter balanced to a large extent by the fact the researcher, with ten years local government experience, has only been with the organisation since March 2007 and therefore regarded as a valuable new observer in Warrington BC.
- Allocation of time – the need to balance demands of daily duties with the need to carry out research. Time management skills being paramount but also the support of the organisation for the research study.
- Level of authority within the organisation – the position of the researcher in the organisation is of significant relevance to the success of the research. This can range from being too junior with lack of access and support or too senior resulting in the observer effect scenario highlighted above. The researcher is at middle management level within the Corporate Services Directorate having access to various levels of staff.

It is inevitable that as a researcher employed by the organisation the highlighted advantages and disadvantages will be faced in the course of the research project but in agreement with Gill and Johnson (2002) there are clear benefits to practitioner research.

3.4.2. Data Collection Methods

This study is based on information collected using a variety of methods as primary, secondary, qualitative, quantitative and experiential data have been drawn on. A multi method approach has been adopted as semi structured interviews, a focus group and statistical data were used to form the basis of the key issues to be addressed in questionnaires. As each tool or technique

has its unique strength and weakness the use of various research procedures in line with the case study strategy enabled triangulation to take place.

Saunders et al (2003) outline quantitative research as data collection resulting in standardised data sets to facilitate analysis of relationships between variables, which can then be highlighted through tables or diagrams and meanings, be derived from the numerical data. However, Silverman (1993) argues that purely quantitative methods of research neglect the social and cultural construction of the variables being researched.

Traditionally it was believed quantitative and qualitative could not be mixed because of their underlying paradigms, yet in fact the current view within social research as expressed by Bryman (2004) is that the two are mutually informing. Jankowicz (2005) states the qualitative/quantitative debate is not one of numbers versus meaning but the basic metaphysical assumptions on which the research method and techniques are based.

The process for each method of data collection utilised in the research project will now be outlined and justified:

- Secondary Data

The secondary data used for the purpose of this research comprises of data collated on absence within Warrington BC in the last five years, the provisional results of Warrington BC Employee Satisfaction Survey, Senior Management Board reports, Committee reports, National statistics from CIPD, CMI and HRM Surveys and procedure guidelines obtained on request from other local authorities and private organisations.

The Warrington absence data has been maintained through a mix of manual and electronic systems and this has been used to analyse trends between departments, nature of work and periods of absence. The data was provided by the Personnel during a fact-finding interview and access was then provided to various absence management system reports.

The MORI employee survey was distributed to a large sample of staff in the autumn of 2008 and confidential returns were submitted to the independent body for consolidation of results and analysis. The survey results providing a basis for managerial focus groups to discuss the development of new corporate procedures alongside the implementation of a revised pay structure.

The data analysis will enable the researcher to triangulate the findings, in order to identify any common trends and areas of good practice to feed into new corporate procedures.

There are several advantages of using secondary data such as the saving in resource time, access to a wider sample for research e.g. government surveys, ease of comparison to assess if own research is representative of general research findings, permanence of data source for public scrutiny and finally secondary research may even lead to unforeseen new theoretical arguments. However, an element of judgement is required on the suitability, reliability and validity of any secondary data and this will be reviewed in the following chapters.

- Primary Data

Results from Initial Research

The results of a smaller review into absence management in Cheshire County Council undertaken in second year MBA research project will provide a basis for research and benchmarking of data analysis.

Interviews

Kahn and Cannell, (1957) cited in Saunders et al (2003) define an interview as a purposeful discussion between two or more people. The form of an interview may be dependent on the position and attitudes of both the interviewer and interviewee. An interview can assist a researcher in gathering valid and reliable data and a fact-finding interview is essentially in the formation of an initial research proposal.

Fact-finding interviews prior to preparing the research proposal were carried out with the Corporate Service Personnel Officer and Corporate Services Director. Providing background on the key issues faced by the authority, how current policies were perceived and what they thought the requirements for change were.

It was recognised semi-structured interviews with a number of senior managers in the authority with all Directorates represented, to establish perceived managerial and employee requirements with regard to work life balance and attendance management, offer a more balanced view and provide rich data to compare and contrast with employee survey results and data analysis during evaluation.

The benefit of semi structured interviews is that the interviewee is able to develop his/her own ideas and expand upon particular points of interest; the design of the interview with a series of standard questions allows for flexibility with an open ended questioning style. In preparing to use semi structured interviews there has to be an acceptance, however, that the interview might need to become more structured, as some participants may not feel as comfortable or willing to freely express opinions.

Objectives of interview were to establish:

- Is absenteeism an issue in their service area?
- Is this primarily short or long-term absence?
- How does this impact on the management of their team?
- What information do they currently use to monitor and manage staff absence and time?
- Do the current working hours of the department match operational need?
- How flexible have the team demonstrated they are willing to be - what is the current working patterns of the team including toil and overtime?
- Have they the resources to be more flexible in working patterns?

- How does flexible working currently work in their service area?
- Are there any recruitment and retention issues?
- What would they like work life balance to deliver in terms of their own role and for the team?

Further semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the Corporate Services Director and Corporate Services Personnel Manager during the period of research following analysis of research data. The objectives of these interviews were to establish:

- What they perceived to be the absence problem within the organisation and the areas that needed to be focus on?
- What would they consider to be a priority in the next three years in order to manage and reduce absence levels?
- What do they feel would be the benefits of introducing work life balance policies?
- Do they consider work life balance to be of most benefit to the organisation or the employees?
- Is work life balance a priority for the senior management board?
- What would they like work life balance to deliver in terms of their own role and for the authority as a whole?

Focus Group

The researcher was a member of a managerial focus group; working alongside managerial representatives from a number of service areas in establishing an understanding of the requirements for and operational management of work life balance and flexible policies within the authority.

A further focus group with a sample of employees was facilitated by the researcher in order to address issues raised in the employee survey and proposed options for work life balance. The employees selected included representatives from service areas where pilot studies were due to or had taken place.

The researcher believes that the use of focus groups is one of the most informative and effective means of data collection across the organisation. Bringing managers together to generate ideas and provide the opportunity for cross directorate team working; through sharing experiences of absence staffing issues faced within the organisation and discussing how these are currently being managed, developing best practice and suggestions for revisions to existing policies in terms of absence management and work life balance.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire will be developed as the primary data collection method for establishing absence management practices and flexible arrangements in other organisations. Questionnaires will be distributed electronically to a population of local authority regional benchmarking contacts.

The questionnaire will be discussed with the corporate personnel officer prior to distribution and a test sample circulated to the researcher's college support group, to ensure that the questions are appropriate and address the key research objective themes prior to external distribution with a covering memo.

A further qualitative questionnaire will also be developed as the primary data collection method for establishing employee understanding and requirements of work life balance policies. Questionnaires will be distributed electronically to a small population of staff within Warrington Borough Council to triangulate with the results of the Employee survey.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical guidance for research was traditionally often overlooked and has only really come to the forefront in recent years as the value of ethical codes in business started to be addressed. In the context of research, ethics refers to the appropriateness of a researcher's behaviour and the conduct of study in relation to the rights of the participants involved or affected by the research in terms of consent and anonymity. As argued by Wells (1994) and Zikmund

(2000) the appropriateness of the researchers behaviour will be affected by broader social norms of behaviour. The researcher should be professional and responsible, use appropriate means for data collection, be open with participants regarding research objectives and ensure consent or accept any refusal to participate, respect confidentiality of data, be aware of the possibility of participant deception and adopt appropriate level of objectivity in interpretation and evaluation of data.

The Corporate Services Director having reviewed the aims and objectives agreed to support the research and provide the researcher with access to secondary personnel data following the assurance anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained and also agreed the researcher's involvement in a managerial focus group to ensure research findings ultimately fed into proposed revisions in corporate policies.

3.6. Time Horizons

To assist in research project management Saunders et al (2003) recommend the use of a Gantt chart for monitoring purposes providing a visual schedule of activities and proposed deadlines plotted against a timeline.

3.7. Summary

The chapter has defined the methodology that will be adopted to undertake the research and discussed the ethical nature of the research.

The following areas were discussed and justified:

- The use of a predominantly phenomenological approach as opposed to a positivist research philosophy.
- The use of the inductive research approach justified as the research area demands a greater understanding of the “softer qualitative issues”.
- The use of a case study research strategy as a multi method approach to research is preferred with the benefits of triangulation of data.

Finally the chapter has discussed and justified the methods and analysis of data that will be utilised in addressing the research question and the issues of validity and credibility surrounding them.

4.0 Analysis of Data

4.1 Introduction

The chapter reports the findings of the research completed. It identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the current absence management and work life balance policy within Warrington BC and presents the main themes that have been identified through the research which need to be addressed in improving and implementing a new corporate absence and work life balance policy. Highlighting, perceived perceptions and barriers to be overcome in order to successfully implement a new corporate policy. These findings will be reviewed in the Chapter 5.

Primary and secondary data has been collected and analysed from departmental records, interviews, focus groups and pilot groups. Where appropriate, the data findings will be presented graphically and due to the descriptive nature of the research area, the quantitative data will be supported with qualitative quotes from research respondents. Respect of confidentiality and anonymity has been taken into account as recommended by Easterby-Smith et al (2002).

4.2 Analysis of Secondary Data

The data findings presented within this section will be Warrington BC absence and employee satisfaction survey data, national comparative statistics from research surveys, management procedures within the council compared with the procedures adopted by other employers.

4.2.1 Absence Levels within Warrington Borough Council

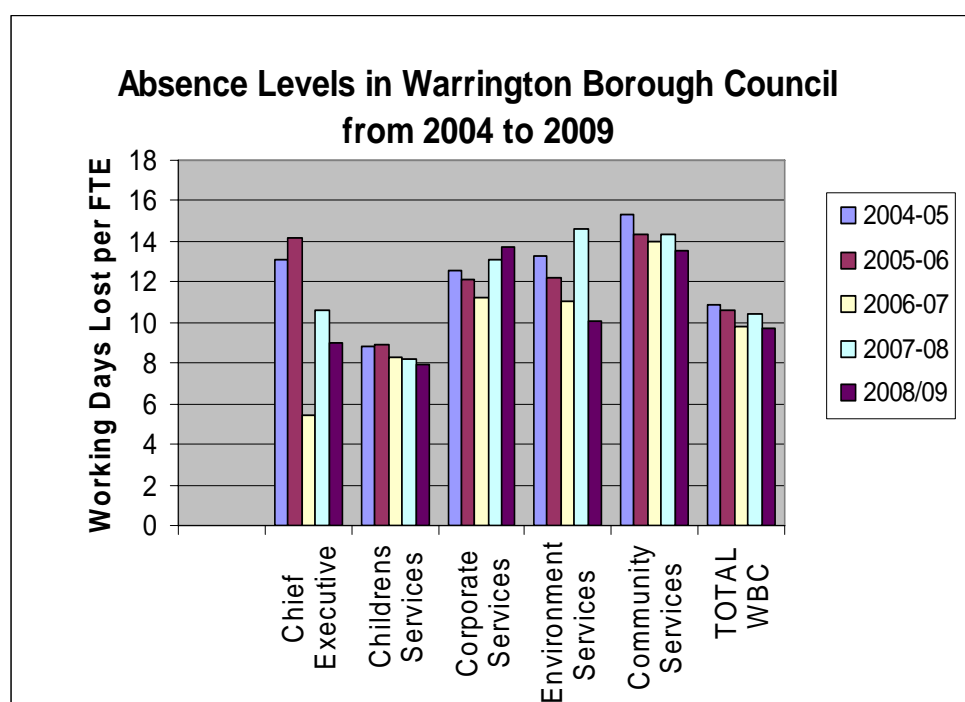
Warrington BC absence level, in line with national public sector trend has increased in the last decade. Whilst improved record keeping may to some extent explain the level of increase; especially with the move to an electronic absence management system in a number of service areas, the level of absence is still a cause for concern for senior management and councillors.

The following table outlines the working days lost per FTE employee within the council in the last five years and further data analysis is included in Appendix 8.1.

Directorate	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008/09
Working Days Lost per FTE					
Chief Executive	13.14	14.19	5.40	10.62	9.02
Childrens Services	8.80	8.93	8.26	8.17	7.91
Corporate Services	12.53	12.08	11.20	13.14	13.69
Environment Services	13.28	12.18	11.08	14.65	10.11
Community Services	15.31	14.35	14.01	14.37	13.58
TOTAL WBC	10.90	10.61	9.82	10.41	9.72

Table 3: Source - WBC Personnel Records

There was a general trend of improvement from 2004 to 2007 within each directorate; but a significant increase in 2007/08 and this increasing trend continued within Corporate Services into 2008/09. The Council absence level is in line with the public sector average of 9.7 working days lost per FTE (2009:CIPD Survey).

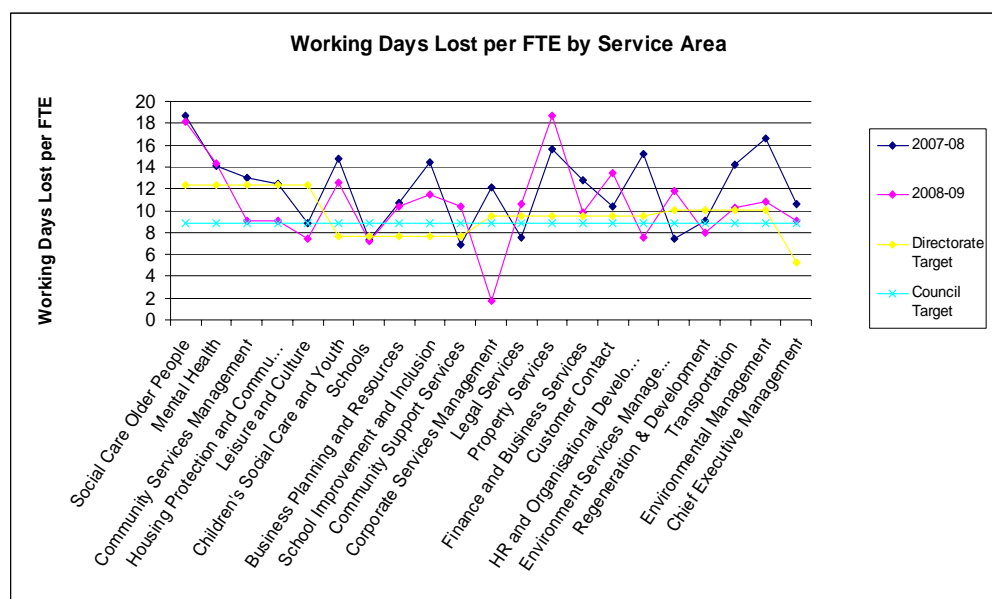


Graph 4: Source –WBC Personnel Records

Graph 4 shows the level of absence within Children's Services has been relatively constant over a five year period. Community Services absence has been consistently high; this is a concern as the directorate includes front line delivery services such as adult social care. The second highest absence levels being within Environment Services; a directorate which also provides front

line public services such as road maintenance and refuse collection. However, the level of absence within Environment Services significantly reduced in 2008/09. Finally, the level of absence within Corporate Services has remained high over the five year period and unlike other directorates has increased in 2008/09.

Graph 5 illustrates that for 2007/08 and 2008/09 the majority of service areas were above the Council target of 8.9 working days lost per FTE and their individual Directorate targets for working days lost.



Graph 5: Source -WBC Personnel Records

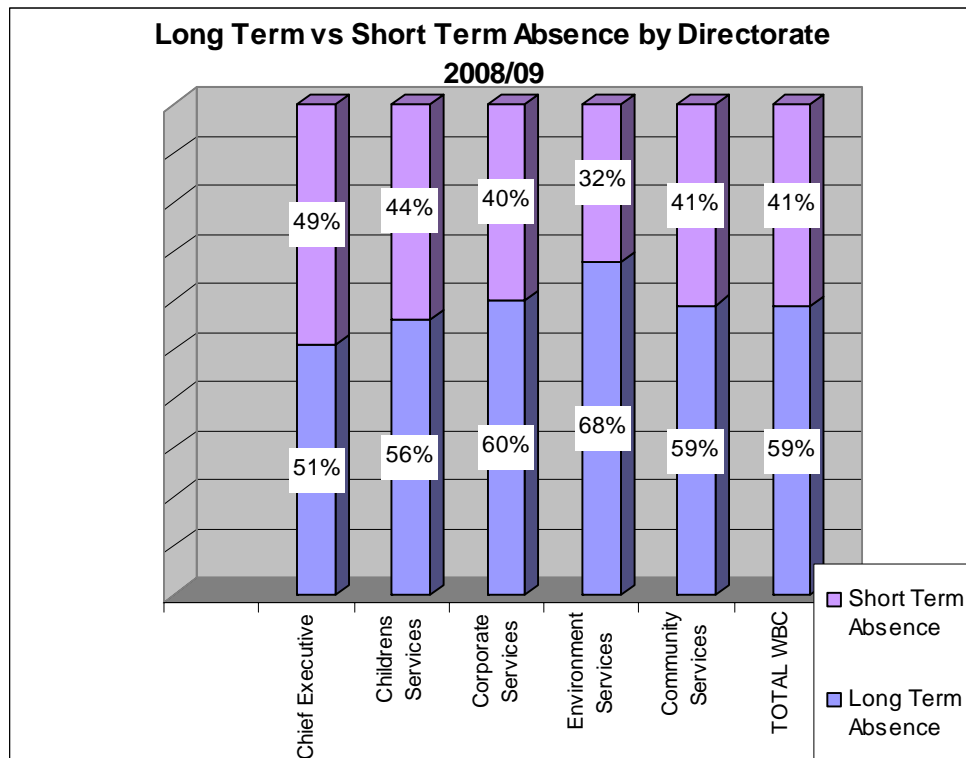
The Community Services directorate has a high level of absence in service delivery areas with Adult Social Care reporting 18.19 working days lost and Mental Health reporting 14.34 working days lost in 2008/09. In reviewing the causes of absence a high percentage in these service areas are work related absences.

Within Children's Service Directorate, Schools account for around three quarters of directorate absence each year but when this level of absence is divided by the number of FTE's in Schools, the reported level given employee working patterns is much lower, with only 7.19 working days lost in 2008/09. The service areas within Children's directorate with the highest absence level are the Children's Social Care Team and School Improvement and Inclusion Team; reporting 12.52 and 11.45 working days lost in 2008/09.

The highest level of absence within the Corporate Services Directorate in 2008/09 was within Property Services at 18.66 working days lost and the Customer Contact Centre at 13.49 working days lost. The absence levels in other Corporate Service areas improved significantly in 2008/09. Further research into the level of absence within Property Services has highlighted the impact long-term genuine absence can have on reported statistics.

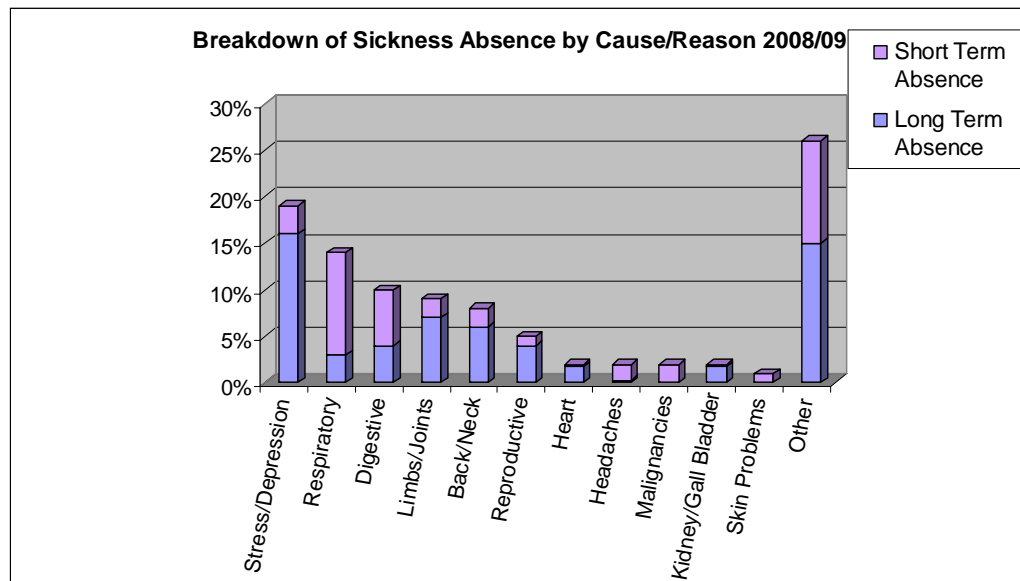
In the Environment Directorate around 65% of absence is within Environmental Management and 24% of absence is within Transport; both service areas providing front line public services and therefore prone to a higher level of work related absence from joint or back injuries. However, the level of absence in these service areas, as shown in graph 5, have significantly improved in 2008/09 with Environmental Services reducing from 16.64 working days lost in 2007/08 to 10.79 working days lost in 2008/09. The success of new absence management procedures for this pilot group will be reviewed in section 4.3.4.

Graph 6 highlights the majority of absence in the Council is of a long-term nature, particularly within Environment Services Directorate.



Graph 6: Source WBC Personnel Records

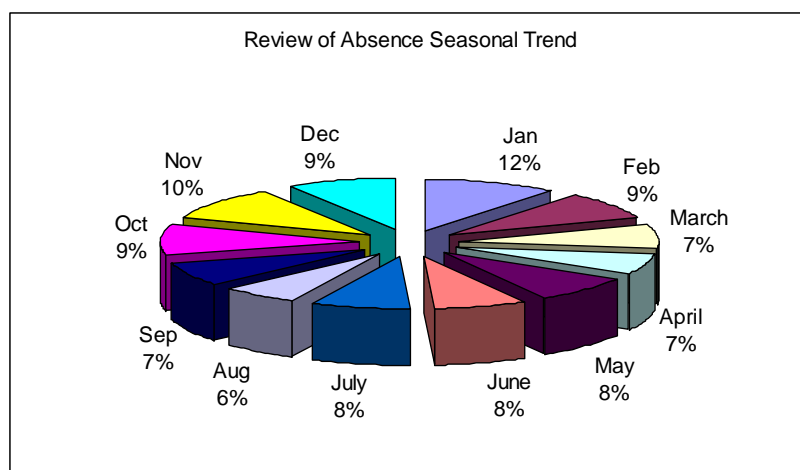
The reasons provided for absence in 2008/09 have been collated and are outlined in graph 7 in terms of the short-term (41%) and long-term (59%) absence for the Council.



Graph 7: Source WBC Personnel Records

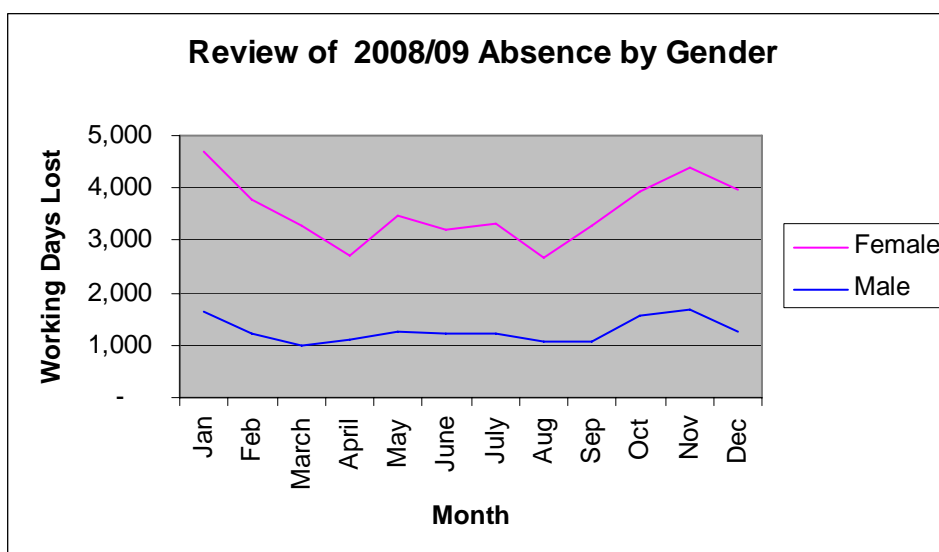
Council records from employee return to work interviews and health certificates identify the main cause of absence as stress and depression; which accounts for 19% of total absence and over a quarter of long-term absence; this was particularly high within front line service areas such as social care. The other main causes of long-term absence are joint/limbs or back/neck problems some of which are identified as work related. The second highest cause of absence was respiratory problems, which accounted for 14% of the total absence level and over a quarter of short-term absence with cold and flu symptoms. One of the other main causes of short-term absence was digestive problems.

Graph 8 highlights the level of absence in the Council is higher between October and February and short-term absence trends also highlight a higher level of absence on Friday and Monday and after Bank Holidays.



Graph 8: Source WBC Personnel Records

Graph 9 illustrates the level of absence within the Council each month by gender. Male absence is higher from October to February and then relatively stable throughout the year; female absence is significantly higher and the lowest level of absence is in April and August.



Graph 9: Source WBC Personnel Records

4.2.2 Absence Management Policies in Warrington BC

A documented absence policy has been in place for a number of years and is published on the intranet; flowchart procedures are included in Appendix 8.2.

In summary, an employee reporting absence from work must speak to their line manager and a contact number must be provided if the manager is not

available. The manager must establish the reason for absence, seek indication of likely duration and establish when contact is next expected. An absence notification electronic/manual form needs to be completed on the first day of absence to document details and notify payroll teams. An employee can self certify for the first week but will require medical certificate from the sixth working day of absence. If the reason provided for absence is stress/anxiety/depression, a work related injury or it is immediately apparent absence is likely to be long-term then the departmental HR officer should be contacted who will then facilitate the need for OHU referral. In the case of long-term absence the policy states a home or workplace meeting should be arranged after two weeks absence. In the case of short-term absence, on return to work the manager should meet with the employee to ensure fitness to work, confirm reason for absence, provide work briefing and complete return to work documentation. If an employee's absence is 10 days plus or this is the fourth absence within the last twelve months then an attendance review meeting is required. The attendance review process may lead to an employee receiving a formal warning regarding absence level and eventual dismissal subject to appeal process or retirement due to ill health.

4.2.3 Work Life Balance Policies within Warrington BC

Employment policies offering an opportunity for employees to address Work Life Balance within the Council have increased in recent years in line with national statutory requirements.

Whilst there is no automatic right to work flexibly as there may be circumstances when the manager is unable to accommodate the employee's desired work pattern; managers have a statutory duty to consider applications and document procedures and decisions. The Council has offered flexibility to employees through flexible hours and working pattern options for a number of years, but the new rights and the need to attract and retain a quality workforce have increased the responsibility on the Council and the need to review option range, extend the scope of flexible working and ensure acceptance and effective management of flexible working practices.

Current flexible working opportunities include:

1. Flexi time scheme – office cover during operational public service hours 9am to 5pm, compulsory core time between 10am to noon and 2pm to 4pm. Employee contracted hours - 148 hours within set four week period (37 hours a week) with the office being open from 8am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday. Time in credit or debit is carried over to the next settlement period with a maximum limit of 10 hours for both and only one day flexi leave can be taken each month.
2. Job sharing – part time workers share duties of FTE post
3. Home working – working from home on Full time or Part Time basis
4. Working Hour Patterns within Contracts – Shift Work or Staggered hours for start, finish and lunch time, Annualised Hours or Standard School Term time only, Compressed working hours for example full time hours over four days or nine days a fortnight.
5. Career breaks.

There is a statutory procedure to be followed in consideration of flexible working requests, which is outlined in a Manager's Guide; criteria assessment included in Appendix 8.3.

4.2.4 Warrington Employee Satisfaction Survey

Warrington BC commissioned Ipsos MORI North in 2008 to undertake an employee survey. This was the second council-wide (excluding staff in schools) employee survey to be undertaken; the results were published in 2009.

The key themes covered by the survey were:

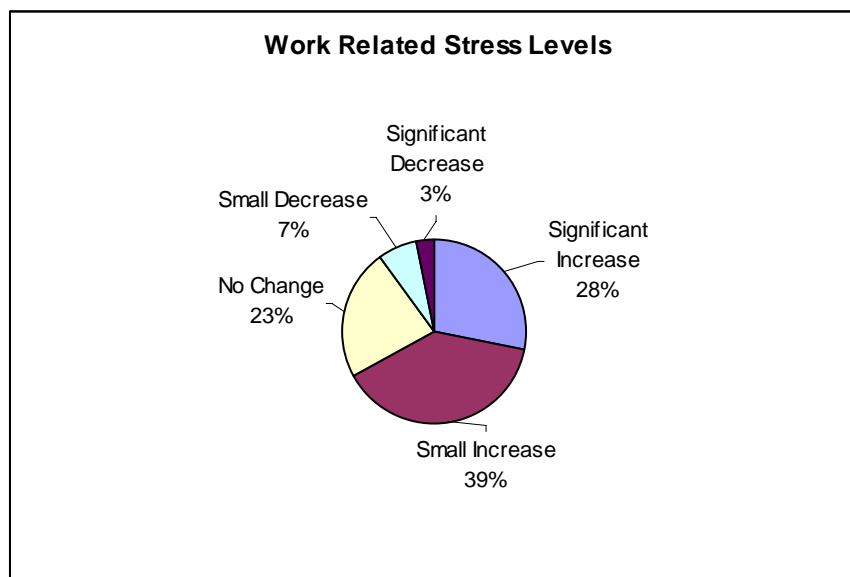
- Working for the Council
- Management Style
- Learning and Development
- Communications
- Flexible Working and Learning
- Benefits and Rewards
- Change and the future

The survey highlighted in general a lack of understanding by employees and managers of working policies and disparity in use. Key results from the survey viewed to be of relevance to the research area are presented and analysed below.

Working for the Council

Half of employees responding to the survey recognised the Council currently as an absenteeism problem and the survey results highlighted a quarter of employees are dissatisfied in their current role and are not motivated in work; with 29% stating they do not look forward to coming into work each day. A key result within this section was only 39% of respondents felt valued having received recognition from management.

The current level of commitment from the workforce is evident with the majority of employees stating they have worked longer hours and through lunch hours to complete workloads and 84% stated they had come to work unwell. Graph 10 shows over two thirds of respondents highlighted an increase in work related stress; but survey results by grade show 80% of senior managers highlighted an increase. A quarter of respondents stated work related stress impacts on their work performance and personal lives.



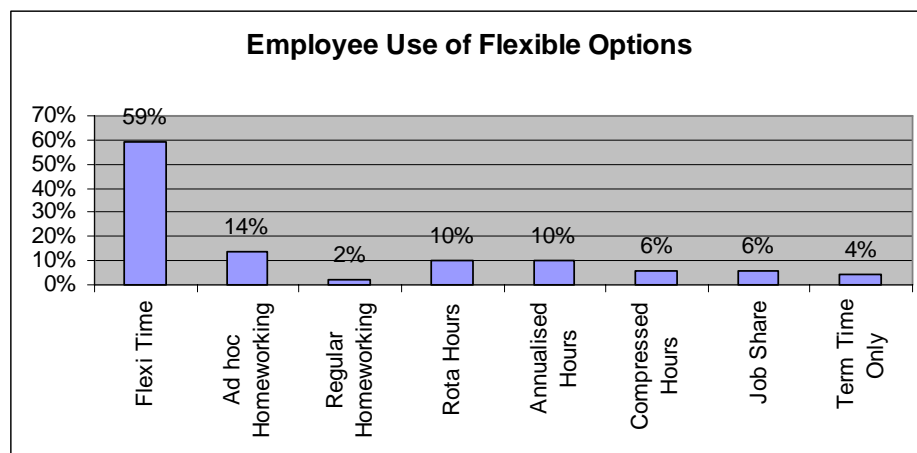
Graph 10: Source- MORI Survey (2008)

Communications

The survey results highlight inconsistent communication approaches within the Council with 46% of respondents stating they feel they are fully or fairly well informed about Council activities and policies, whereas 51% believe they get only limited information. The main information source identified by employees was the intranet. A key result within this section of relevance to the research area is 16% of respondents stated they had never had a one to one meeting with their line manager.

Flexible Working

The survey results showed employees recognise flexible working is offered within the council although two thirds of respondents stated more flexibility would be possible in their current role without it having a negative effect on service delivery. The conflict between grades and directorates on the impact on service delivery of flexible working however is highlighted in analysis of responses. The survey results shown in Graph 11 reflect current use of flexible options within the council; the majority of staff contracts offer flexible time but use of other flexible benefits, are subject to managerial approval. Analysis by directorate shows high level of term time only working in Children Services. Rota and Compressed hours are used in a number of front line services such as Highways and Waste Management, Social Care and Customer Contact Centre providing flexibility to employees and enabling the Council to cover longer service delivery hours to the public. Whilst home working has increased in recent years it is still mainly on an ad hoc basis.

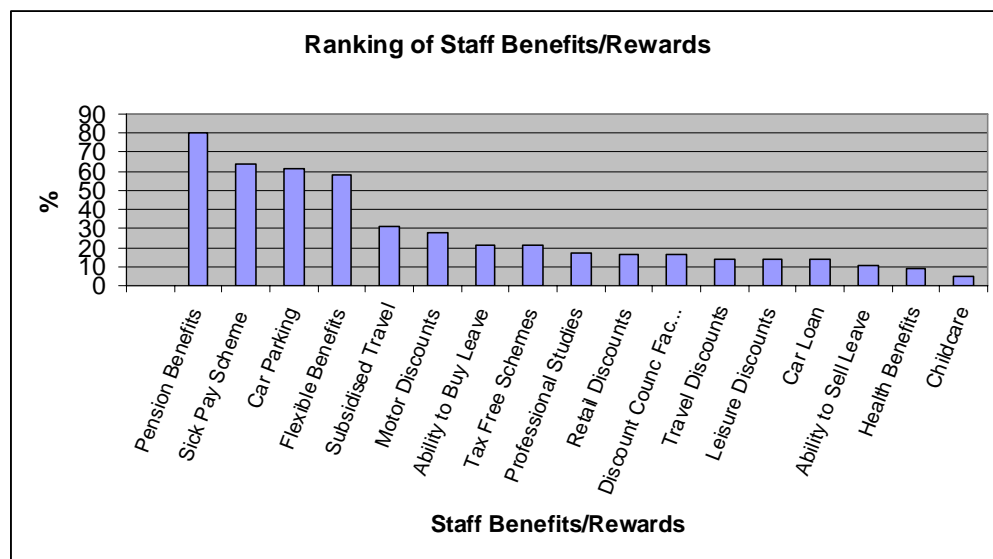


Graph 11: Source MORI Survey (2008)

Benefits and Rewards

Half of respondents to the survey stated they are satisfied with the current employee benefits package offered by the Council and the results highlighted that satisfaction does not vary across the grades although it is highest amongst those based in Central Administrative Buildings.

The Graph 12 illustrates the ranking of benefits from survey results. The key themes identified as important to staff were financial security (pension schemes, sick pay and loans), work life balance (flexible working and ability to buy leave), travel support (car parking, motoring discounts, tax free cycle scheme and subsidised travel) and discount schemes (retail, travel and leisure).



Graph 12: Source MORI Survey (2008)

4.3 Analysis of Primary Data

The data findings presented within this section will be a summary of initial research on absence management within Cheshire County Council, attendance at focus groups, fact finding and semi structured interviews held with officers in Warrington BC, questionnaire responses on absence management procedures and work life balance distributed to officers within Warrington BC and external organisations.

4.3.1 Initial Research

The researcher previously completed a review of absence management within Cheshire County Council Finance Office. This involved analysis of absence statistics, interview with personnel and managerial officers to identify key themes and distribution of a small sample of questionnaires. The research outlined the cultural problem of high absenteeism within public sector bodies and poor absence management. Highlighting whilst short-term absence is starting to be addressed even if not always effectively, long-term absence is poorly managed and in fact accounts for 60% to 70% of productive time lost and the high cost of absence in the public sector.

The report recommended a combined approach of:

- improving absence management
- consistent adoption of disciplinary preventative approaches
- supporting measures for return to work and use of occupation health
- raised profile of health awareness and the wellbeing of staff

4.3.2 Interviews

As outlined within chapter 3, fact-finding and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Corporate Services Director and Corporate Services Personnel Manager and the notes from the interviews are documented in appendix 8.4.

The following absence issues were identified although it was stressed that a number of improvements have been applied in recent years including the rollout of an electronic absence system:

- High level of Short and Long Term absence
- Employee abuse of absence system
- Poor standard and inconsistent absence management
- Implications on service delivery of genuine illness
- Role of HR, OHU and Manager often confused
- Frequency and inadequate reporting of absence statistics
- Need for refresher managerial training in attendance, capacity and workforce planning/development, Stress Management and Work Life Balance policies.

The key objectives identified for the long-term vision for Warrington BC were: to reduce absence levels, improve staff morale, increase employees access to flexible working, enhance ICT provisions to enable flexible working and achieve efficiency savings.

Whilst a number of flexible policies are in place it was recognised to succeed a major culture change would be required; therefore it was essential both senior officer and member support was secured and a clear communication strategy developed to ensure consistent approach and an invest to save strategy over the medium term in order to achieve long-term efficiency savings.

The Corporate Service Personnel Manager stated:

“Work life balance needs to deliver a more effective organisation, improved morale and equality of opportunities for all staff”

It was understood a level of capital investment would be required in order to update technology, network capacity and security, complete office renovation to improve open plan working and maximise usage of office space, as well as project management and managerial training programme. Initial investment will be offset by future capital receipts and rental savings due to efficiency in office accommodation as well as anticipated cost savings from increased productivity, lower energy consumption and reduction in recruitment and agency cover costs linked to high level of absence.

Further semi structured interviews took place with a sample of service managers from each directorate in order to draw comparability and triangulate results. The notes from interviews are documented in appendix 8.4 and responses outlined below:

- **Is absenteeism an issue in their service area?**

Managers stated absenteeism was or had been an issue within their service area. A number were aware of current performance levels within their own

team and the Council, but some were surprised at the level of absence in service areas.

- **Is this primarily short or long term absences?**

Long-term absence was regarded as the most disruptive in terms of team workload and performance statistics but in most cases this was considered to be genuine absence, which needed to be managed through regular contact and use of OHU. Most managers felt it was harder to address the level of short-term absence in teams and a number of managers stated they had experienced cases of abuse but admitted the level of challenge in return to work interviews if held is often weak.

- **What information do they currently use to monitor and manage staff absence and time?**

Systems used by managers varied between services from manual records to electronic records; over half of managers stated they now used the new electronic system but it became evident there was inconsistency in approach for the timing of recording absence and return to work interviews and the level of detail recorded. They stated they did not or rarely review time recording records.

- **Do the current working hours of the department match operational need?**

Responses varied as a number of managers felt the current working hours offered an acceptable level of flexibility and matched service delivery requirements. However, managers in front line services highlighted the need for changes in working patterns as requests for service delivery have altered and therefore more flexible working could provide the solution to offering a new level of service and improved service delivery to customers.

- **Have they the resources to be more flexible in working patterns?**

The following concerns were expressed:

- Insufficient staffing resources and budget
- Fear loss of control of team working hours and harder to manage
- Increase conflicts in team

- Fear increase managerial workloads and resentment as required to judge requests
- Fear another initiative inconsistently applied or not followed through in practice as unable to deliver.

- **How does flexible working currently work in service area?**

Following service manager interviews it is clear there are a number of inconsistencies in approach. The disparity which was most evident related to carry forward of additional flexi, the policy on overtime and action taken for excess negative hours. Home working is not encouraged by many managers due to fear of loss of control and productivity reduction.

- **What would they like work life balance to deliver in terms of their own role and for the team?**

The following are some of the key themes outlined from responses:

- Improved staff morale
- Commitment to the organisation
- Improved Service delivery and productivity
- Stress reduction/improved health of workforce
- Better family/home and work life
- Team and Individuals increased feeling of being valued
- Reduction in absence levels, disciplinary procedures, stress and ill health retirements
- Increased retention and improved response to recruitment

4.3.3 Questionnaire Results

The questionnaires were designed to benchmark absence and work life balance policies adopted by other employers and establish employee understanding and requirements of work life balance policies within Warrington BC. Copies of the questionnaires issued and the processed data from the questionnaire responses can be found within appendix 8.5.

The **Employer Questionnaire** had three sections and the responses received from 14 Personnel Departments are reviewed and presented in the following section.

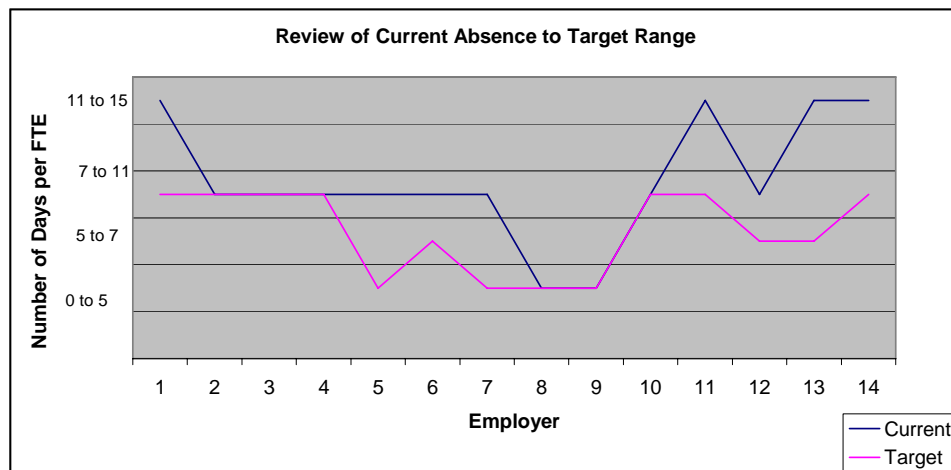
Policy and Communication

All of the employer respondents stated they had an absence management policy but 3 of the 14 respondents stated they did not have a written policy for work life balance. The results revealed the main communication method for policies is via the intranet and management induction/training workshops. Respondents also stated there were inconsistent managerial approaches applied against both policies in practice.

Absence Management

All of the employer respondents stated they distinguished between short and long-term absence and the majority had specific criteria/triggers to determine when disciplinary action was to be applied. The basis from triggers varied between employers from over 5 days absence, number of absence in a period or patterns of absence and the periods for monitoring ranged from 3 to 12 months with some applying a rolling basis for period monitoring.

The majority of employers stated they had a higher level of absenteeism than performance target illustrated in graph 13.

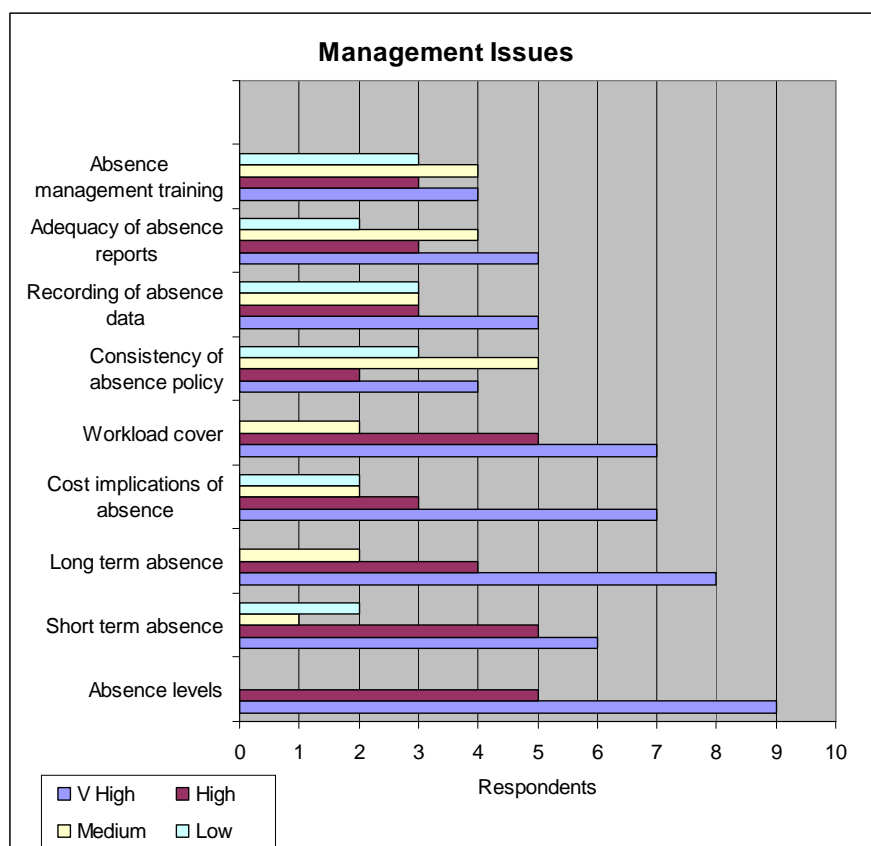


Graph 13: Source - Employer Questionnaires

The cost of absence was only calculated by six of the respondents but eight respondents stated absence monitoring was included in their appraisal process. The measures in place for contacting employees were consistent: telephone contact, home visits and the majority also used an OHU. Similarly, options

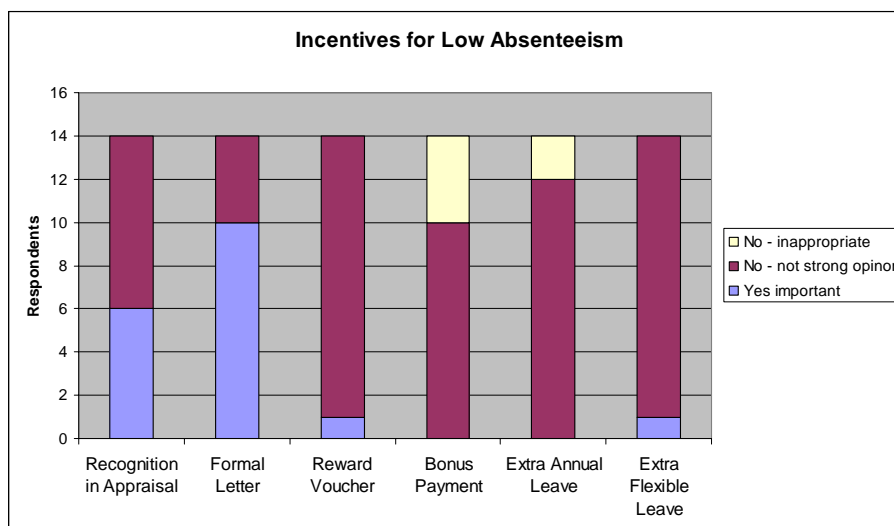
adopted for return to work were consistent: return to work interviews, provisional light duties, adjusted hours and use of rehabilitation services.

Graph 14 highlights the main managerial issues to be absence levels, in particular long-term absence, work load cover and cost implications. However, the consistency in application of policies and accuracy of data records and reports were also identified as key concerns for employers. Absence management training was ranked as the lowest concern; but only two employers ranked their current training programme as excellent with the majority of respondents stated their current programme was average.



Graph 14: Source - Employer Questionnaires

Graph 15 illustrates employers considered recognition of good attendance via formal letter or in the appraisal process as the most appropriate incentives to ensure low absenteeism. Some respondents regarded financial bonus payments or additional leave as inappropriate approaches.

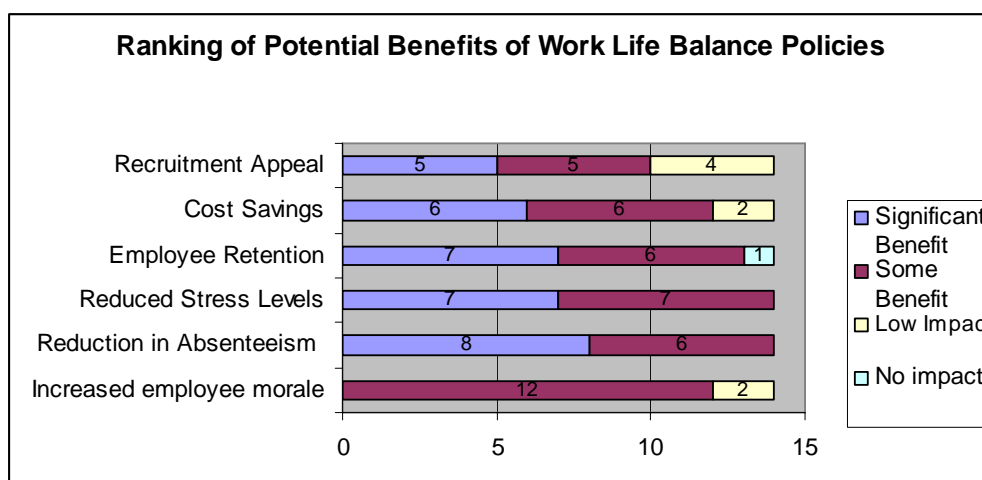


Graph 15: Source - Employer Questionnaires

Work Life Balance

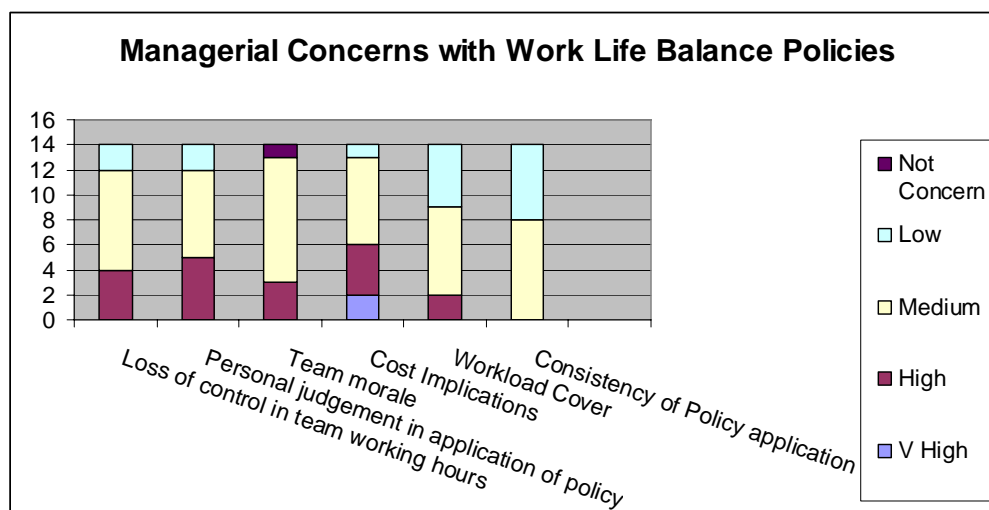
All respondents stated they offered job share and reduced hours and some stated they offered: career breaks, flexi time and flexible retirement. Ten respondents identified the scope of current policy to be satisfactory with the majority stating service delivery was not restricted by policies.

Questionnaire results shown in graph 16 highlight the highest ranked benefits were absence and stress reduction and increased staff morale. The ranking of financial benefits from cost savings, employee retention and recruitment appeal were mixed with a few respondents stating there would be a low impact.



Graph 16: Source - Employer Questionnaires

Graph 17 illustrates the main concern for Employers is the cost of work life balance policies. However, the role of personal judgement by managers in application of policies, team morale and control of team were also identified as managerial concerns.



Graph 17: Source - Employer Questionnaires

The **Employee Questionnaire** also had three sections and the responses are reviewed and presented in the following tables and graphs and compared against the Mori survey reviewed in section 4.2.4.

Policy and Communication

Whilst the majority of employee respondents were aware and had seen the Council absence management policy a number of employees stated they were not aware or had not read the Work Life Balance policy. Respondents also stated there were inconsistent managerial approaches applied against both policies in practice.

Awareness of Absence Management policy	90%
Awareness of Work Life Balance policy	65%
Absence Management policy viewed to be inconsistent	45%
Work Life Balance policy viewed to be inconsistent	90%

Table 4: Source - Employee Questionnaires

Only 40% of respondents felt communication with regard to the Council policies was good. This is in line with Mori survey results, which stated 46% of staff felt well informed. The questionnaire also highlighted the preference for communication is via intranet and training.

How would you prefer to be communicated with regard to policies	
Intranet	15%
Intranet & training	60%
Team briefing	25%

Table 5: Source - Employee Questionnaires

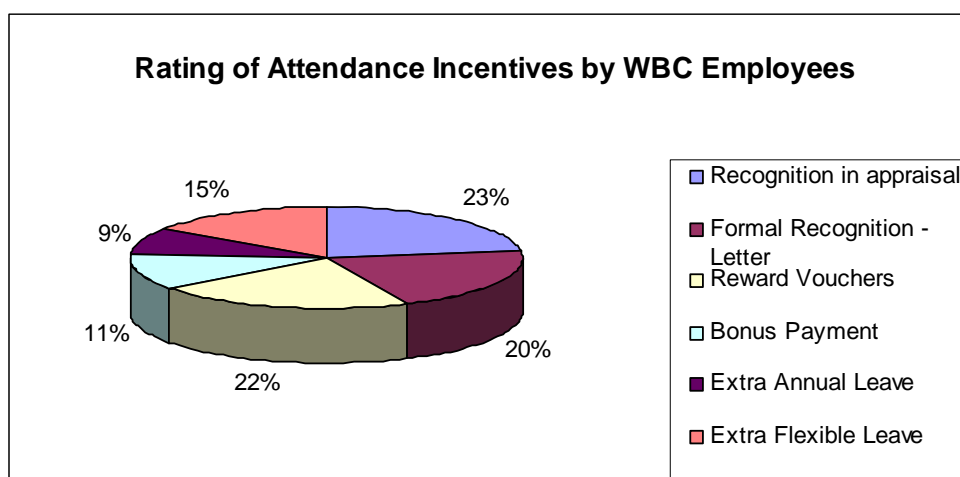
Absence Management

The level of absenteeism within the Council was regarded as high by 70% of respondents to the questionnaire but only 45% stated absence and well being had been discussed in their appraisal meetings with a line manager. The responses to each of the positive incentives identified in the questionnaire have been ranked as outlined in the following table.

Yes - need recognition	2
No Strong Opinion	1
No /Inappropriate	0

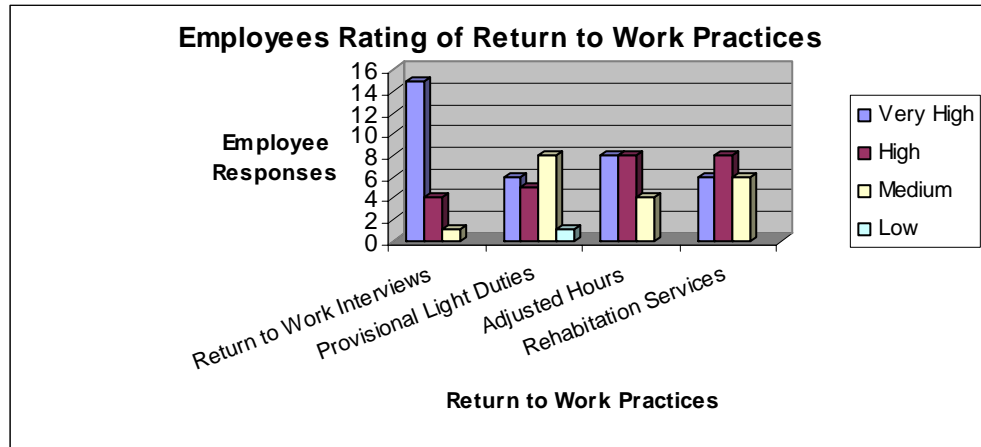
Table 6: Ranking Methodology

Graph 18 shows zero or low cost incentives such as recognition by management by letter or in appraisal were ranked higher than some cash incentives and a few employees stated financial or extra leave rewards were inappropriate.



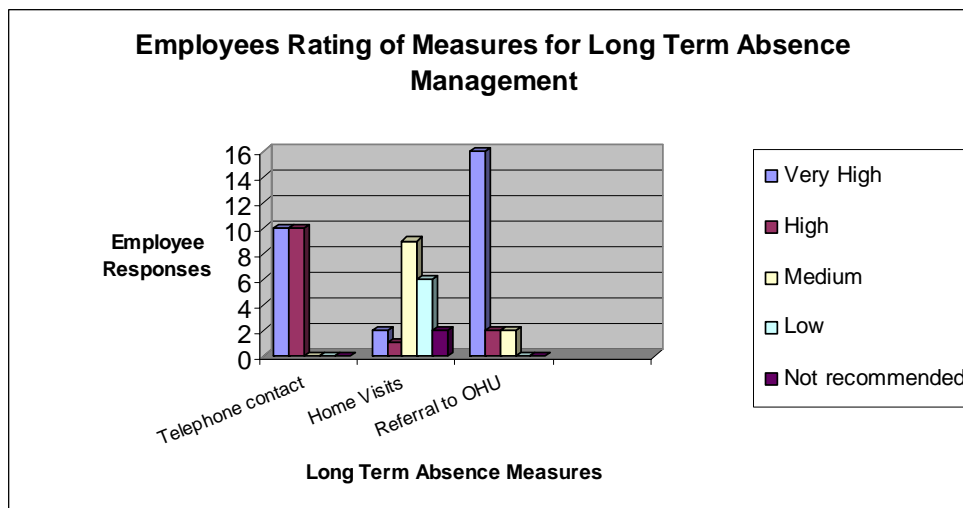
Graph 18: Source - Employee Questionnaires

Graph 19 outlines respondents rating of return to work practices; highlighting the importance of managerial return to work interviews which will assist a review of any underlying issues and an employee's ability to carry out normal duties or work a standard day or week.



Graph 19: Source - Employee Questionnaires

Long-term absence as outlined in section 4.2.1, accounts for 59% of absence in the Council; the best measures to address this issue are regular managerial contact and referral to Occupation Health. However, graph 20 shows home visits have a mixed rating.

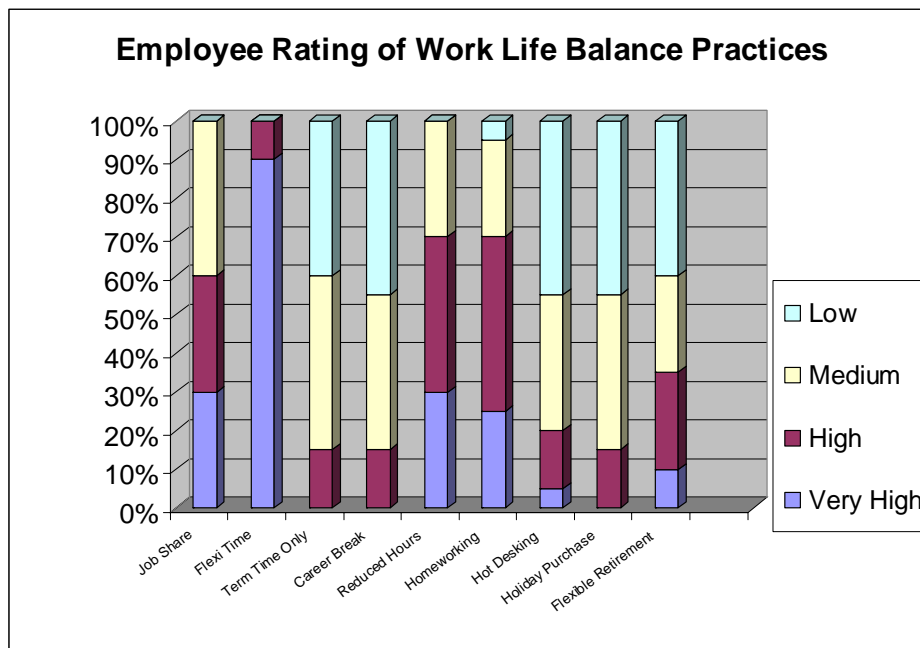


Graph 20: Source - Employee Questionnaires

Work Life Balance

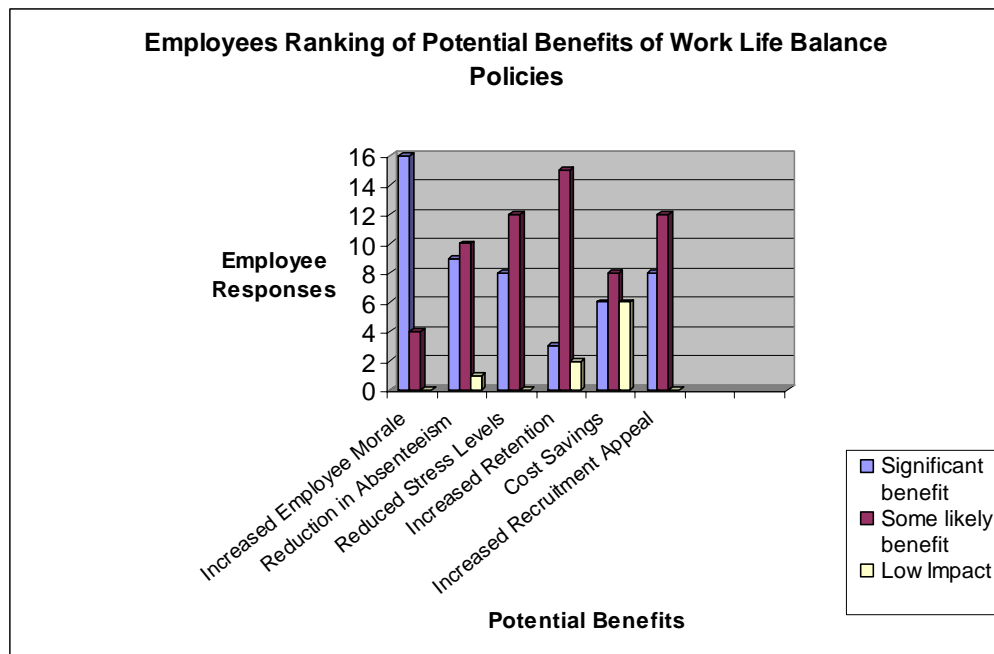
Whilst respondents were aware of most work life balance practices in the Council a number stated they were not aware of the opportunity to take a career break or flexible retirement. The current work life balance policy satisfied 45% of respondents; this is in line with the 48% satisfaction level in the Mori survey. Whilst 65% of respondents felt work life balance policies would not restrict service delivery; comments included “flexible policies can benefit service delivery”, “service delivery can be more flexible and meet public needs” “fear will impact promotion opportunities” and “flexible working can be very hard to manage”.

Graph 21 illustrates respondents rated flexi time, job share, reduced hours and home working as the most popular work life policies and the lowest ranked were hot desks, holiday purchase and career breaks.



Graph 21: Source - Employee Questionnaires

Graph 22 highlights the highest ranked benefits from work life balance policies for employees were: absence and stress reduction and increased staff morale. Ranking of cost savings from work life balance policies was mixed.



Graph 22: Source - Employee Questionnaires

4.3.4 Focus Workshops – Pilot Groups

The researcher was a member of a managerial focus group and facilitated employee focus groups; the discussion points and issues raised in the focus workshops are highlighted in this section.

Objectives were set by members and senior management team to improve attendance levels and employee policies and the researcher working alongside managerial representatives from a number of service areas, attended quarterly workshops in order to understand service requirements and operational management of work life balance and flexible policies within the authority.

Performance measures were identified by the researcher to review the success of pilot schemes; however, it is clearly difficult to measure all benefits and the change process will need to be continually monitored over a period of time:

- Improvement in Attendance Management
- Decrease in Self Certification/Short-term absence
- Reduction in Special Leave/ appointment requests
- Employee Requests for Home working IT access
- Number of staff taking career breaks
- Number of job share within a team or workforce

- Number of Work Life Balance requests received and accepted
- Staff Retention Rates by grade
- Reduction in ill health/early retirement

The source for performance data collection, baseline current data and performance targets; as well as the results from pilots for some of these performance measures are outlined in the appendix 8.6. Reviews during pilot period highlighted the weakness in data records and therefore the change during this period is difficult to assess. However, the results show that whilst not all requests could be accommodated due to service delivery requirements, the most requested work pattern changes were: compressed hours and enhanced flexi time which managers found relatively easy to facilitate. Greater awareness of home access to IT systems and pilot home working resulted in an increase in requests for access with managerial authorisation but home working based on workshop discussions is still primarily on an ad hoc basis. Whilst, there was no significant change in the number of job share within the workforce, term time working was evident within Children's service and there was a small increase during the pilot; however there was limited evidence of rollout to other service areas. The change in approach to rota working was successful in the Revenue and Benefits and Environmental Service pilots, evidenced by an improvement in employee attendance highlighted in table below.

Pilot Service Areas	Working Days Lost PER FTE		
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Children's Social Care and Youth	18.57	14.77	12.52
Transportation	9.91	14.21	10.29
Environmental Management	13.59	16.64	10.79
Finance and Business Services (includes Revenue and Benefits)	12.6	12.83	9.85

Table 7: Source – WBC Personnel records

A workshop was arranged to review pilot case studies and discuss the following work life balance topic areas:

- Benefits of Work Life Balance to Individual and Organisation
- Responsibilities and accountabilities of employee and manager
- Development of an open and transparent process for review of employee application
- Managerial tools for output/performance measures

The discussion groups provided managerial insight to lessons learnt from pilots. The evidence of success resulting in managerial “buy in” with perceptions changing as the benefits were outlined and a review of the pitfalls providing an opportunity to highlight the importance of the managerial and employee role in the process, enabling the HR team to understand requirements in order to provide direction through policy documents, training and on going support.

Focus groups were also arranged with a sample of employees including representatives from pilot study service areas. The data from these workshops providing further analysis to support survey and questionnaire results highlighting employee support of work life balance opportunities and in particular the option of reduced/compressed hours and enhanced flexi time to include no core time. The following statements were made during focus group feedback sessions:

- “Extremely useful in reducing stress rate in morning, I can relax knowing my children are happy and settled with the child minder and in school; making a difference to my concentration and performance during the day.”
- “Rota changes and self rostering assisted me with balancing child care arrangements”
- “General morale in the office has improved since more flexible working introduced, works well to adjust working hours to suit me, by coming in early, shorter lunchtime and optional early or late finishes subject to workload and home life demands”
- “Fantastic – small changes but significant impact and makes me feel valued within the department as a person not a number”
- “It works as long as team members and management communicate and talk to each other to ensure workload covered and duties allocated”
- “Part time working does still limit career progression but hopefully this will improve as the benefits of work life balance policies are understood and there is an increase in managerial support for the policy”.

4.4 Summary

The chapter has presented the research findings and has provided a comprehensive 'data set' to meet and answer the research aims and objectives.

The primary and secondary data has provided a detailed analysis of absence management and work life balance within Warrington BC. The case study research has enabled the author to meet the research aim by considering what the most important attributes are for successful absence management and work life balance within the Council. The absence statistics, questionnaires and semi structured interviews have provided a rich source of quantitative and qualitative data. Findings from research surveys and the Mori Survey provided an effective comparison, thus enabling the author to triangulate the findings.

All data and findings in this chapter were obtained by following the methodology set out in chapter 3. Chapter 5 will critically review the chosen methodology and draw on conclusions relating to the research questions to ensure continuous improvement in attendance management and promotion of work life balance within the authority.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The chapter will critically review the research methodology adopted outlining any limitations and discussing the links between the literature research in chapter 2 and the research findings in chapter 4. Conclusions will be reached for the research question and aims and areas for further research will be identified enabling continuous improvement in attendance management and promotion of work life balance within the authority.

5.2 Critical Evaluation of Adopted Methodology

The phenomenological research philosophy and an interpretivist, inductive approach as part of the chosen methodology was appropriate, as it enabled the author to address research aims and objectives; having developed a well grounded basis for evaluation following data collection and analysis. Thus, allowing conclusions to be drawn, due to the qualitative intentions to gain an understanding of the issues and personal behaviour. This enabled an exploration into what is happening within Warrington BC in terms of absence management and work life balance enabling patterns to be identified and linked as a means for establishing a transformation agenda and launching revised policies. However a number of issues have inhibited the research and they are discussed in the following sections.

5.2.1 Case Study

Robson (2002:178) defines case study strategy as doing research involving empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within real life context using multiple evidence to understand why; as well as what and how. Yin (2002) states you need to be clear regarding units of analysis and the researcher may be open to influence and therefore needs to triangulate using multiple evidence to determine conclusions. This is pertinent due to the difficulties that could be experienced gaining access to information by researchers and would prevent them from gaining the true intensity of opinion within organisations.

The researcher attended managerial project groups and employee focus groups so developed an understanding of lessons learnt during pilot studies within Warrington BC. It is concluded, the combination of questionnaires and semi structured interviews were successful to develop an understanding of issues and case studies within the organisation and externally, as a number of managers discussed their experiences and best practices whilst working in other organisations. The researcher attended two symposium HR conferences gaining further insight and was able to discuss case studies presented from the private and public sector. Due to the volume of research using multiple methods, the approach needed to be managed in terms of time limitations and priorities as areas for further research opportunities were developed.

5.2.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were distributed to delve through the management layers of the organisation in order to capture a variety of opinions and gain an understanding of practices and issues in other organisations. Questionnaires completed by employees provided useful comparative data to triangulate with the Mori survey and additional qualitative detail. Whilst the response rate to the Employer questionnaire was good, HR personnel mainly completed these and therefore a degree of prejudice in responses needs to be considered.

5.2.3 Interviews

Semi structured interviews with open ended questions were carried out and although they were non-compulsory, there were no refusals. Responses from the questions exposed variations between services, implications of managerial styles on employee behaviour, as well as fears and expectations that will need to be addressed.

5.2.4 Secondary Data

Secondary data provided a number of advantages to the research. Time was dedicated to scrutinise data as a consequence of the availability of internal publications and statistics; although accuracy of the data could be challenged, for example the absence data was reliant upon managerial input and employee responses. Additionally more use could be made from the results of employee

satisfaction surveys and performance statistics outlined in 4.3.3 from pilots, if this information were available.

External data including case studies from conference events and absence management and work life balance policies from other organisations; enabled triangulation of data to provide comparability of working practices.

5.2.5 Conclusions

In conclusion the methodology has worked well with the nature of this research. It has provided substantive and meaningful data to answer and address the research aims and objectives, despite issues raised in the above critique.

5.3 Conclusions about the Research Objectives

The research findings will now be reviewed against the research aims outlined in the first chapter.

5.3.1 To examine the perceived problem of absenteeism within the public sector in particular within local government.

The literature research showed the perceived problem of absenteeism was in fact a reality; which needed to be understood before any corrective action could be applied. The 2009 CIPD survey highlighted (section 2.3.1) the highest absence level is within the public sector. The absence level within local Government is high with an average cost of £794 per employee and on average 10.7 working days lost per FTE. The Gershon Efficiency agenda has meant the loss of potential productivity time is coming under increased scrutiny and resulted in the setting of significant long-term targets for the public sector.

Within the findings chapter (4.2.1); absenteeism within Warrington BC is outlined with the levels of absence ranging from 9.72 to 10.9 working days lost per FTE; with the following peaks: Environmental Services 14.65 and Community Services 14.37 days per FTE.

Female absence was identified as significantly higher. Whilst, this may be due to work life balance as females in general have the prime responsibility for

dependants, the impact of higher female employment in the public sector needs to be considered. However, these findings are in line with research identified in the literature review for example NAO review (2005) and Hayday (2006) who highlighted domestic and kinship responsibilities as critical factors in absence in particular for female workforce.

The main absence causes in Warrington BC were stress/depression, limbs/joint, back/neck, respiratory and digestive. Findings were in line with CIPD surveys outlined within the literature review (section 2.3.3). Hayday (2006) highlights workplace patterns, health and safety, excessive hours and stress as causes of absence stating aspects of the working environment affect the well-being of staff. The findings in chapter 4 identified high levels of absence in front line services such as social care and customer services centre often due to work related stress and evidence in Environmental Services of work related injury absence.

Whilst the trends shown in absence data have been useful the researcher is aware statistics may be flawed during transition period. However, the results of the Mori survey (4.2.4) and the primary research (4.3) also highlighted employees recognise the Council currently has an absenteeism problem.

In conclusion, the recent sickness absence trends could in part be due to a period of instability within Warrington BC and whilst the CIPD report highlighted the fear of job security was not as significant in the public sector, the impact of recent announcement of significant efficiency savings resulting in workforce reductions may lead to a further impact on absenteeism.

5.3.2 To critically review literature to establish what the concept of work life balance is and what benefit if any it can be to an organisation; in particular in terms of addressing absenteeism.

The wide range of interpretations to the concept of work life balance and what it can offer an organisation and its employees were outlined within the literature review section 2.4.1. The 2007 Work Foundation report defines Work-life balance as:

“individuals being able to have some control and autonomy over where, when and how they work”

Research and survey results from JRF, CMI, TUC, CIPD and DTI within the literature review highlight need for the concept to be all-embracing due to the extensive range of individual priorities. This was evident from primary research findings in section 4.3; employee respondents to the questionnaire rated flexi time, job share, reduced hours and home working as the most popular policies and the lowest ranked were hot desks, holiday purchase and career breaks (4.3.3). The results of the Employer questionnaire highlighted variation in policies with most authorities offering job share, reduced hours and the majority offering flexi-time but not always to all employees depending on workload requirements and employee grade.

The literature review outlines changing relationship between employers and employees from one of authoritarian control with no choice on working conditions to innovative, empowering and reactive managerial styles with increased flexibility. However, following legislative changes and revisions in working policies; what is offered is “more rhetoric than reality” (Overell 2006). Employee use of flexible benefits in Warrington BC illustrated in section 4.2.4 highlighted other than flexi time used by 59% of employees in reality use of other flexible policies is low; ranging from 2% to 14%. Findings are in line with the Work Foundation Survey 2006, which outlined despite technological and social advances just under 25% of employees are working differently with only 2% working mainly from home.

The research findings in section 4.3 identified the main benefits from work life balance policies as increased staff morale, improved service delivery and productivity and absence and stress reduction. However, employee fears of negative promotional prospects and managerial reluctance to agree to flexible working proposals were also identified; therefore explaining the relative low take up by employees. The ranking of the financial benefits due to cost savings from work life balance policies was mixed with a few respondents stating savings may be minimal due to offsetting cost implications and the need to embed the policy across the organization.

Case studies in the literature review recognised the benefits in terms of cost savings, increased productivity and lower absence. The Work Foundation Report 2007 outlines the success of work life balance policies in BT and Bristol City Council. Recent research also highlighted the link between the recession and work life balance as organisations recognise the benefits and actively support policies to encourage flexible working, reduce absence and achieve efficiency savings. However, the negative impact on absenteeism, stress and employee reluctance due to fear of job insecurity have been highlighted by researchers.

To conclude, whilst work life balance policies were evidenced to reduce absence levels, the use of these to address efficiency savings and the implications of recession provides a further area for research; as policies offering flexibility may also cause some cynicism and resentment if viewed as forced on employees.

5.3.3 To identify and analyse the current strengths and weaknesses of the absence and work life balance policies within Warrington BC.

The absence management policy is outlined in section 4.2.2 and the work life balance policies are outlined in 4.2.3. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified based on the documented policies, questionnaire, interview and focus group responses.

Strengths:

- Written policy available on intranet
- Standard return to work documentation available
- Electronic Absence System being rolled out
- Triggers in place for attendance reviews
- OHU service available
- Attendance review process documented through to dismissal
- Application process for flexible working
- Flexible Working Hours for the majority of employees
- Limited childcare vouchers

Weaknesses:

- Reliance on managerial input for completion of absence records

- Inconsistent approach in completion of absence records and compliance with triggers and holding attendance review meetings. 45% of questionnaire respondents identified inconsistency in practice
- Completion of return to work and absence documentation not reviewed on regular basis to ensure compliance and accuracy
- Training provided for new managers but need to roll out refresher training or re-launch policies to emphasise managerial priority
- Highest cause of long-term absence identified as stress but no occupational stress workshops held for employees or managers
- Managerial failure to address poor attendance through return to work interviews, one to one meetings or annual appraisal
- Cost of absence records not maintained in terms of sickness pay to employee and additional costs e.g. overtime costs or agency cover.
- Work life Balance policies fragmented and poorly communicated, 65% of questionnaire respondents aware of existence
- Inconsistent approach across the Authority with ad hoc arrangements in particular flexible working carry forward and time in lieu. 90% of questionnaire respondents identified inconsistency in practice
- Current flexi time scheme viewed to be too rigid
- Managerial reluctance to address performance management and facilitate home working targets
- No hot desk booking system or telephony system for dial in access
- Job application form does not include request for flexible working and adverts do not state flexible working available
- Limited managerial training and guidance on the practicalities and contractual obligations of flexible working practices.

In conclusion, the following good practices were identified:

- Electronic systems –dashboard reports and trigger for line manager to complete return to work or attendance review
- Staff recognition for good attendance - letter from Chief Executive or reward such as retail voucher or additional leave. Questionnaire responses highlighted letter as more appropriate in the public sector.

- Flexible Working – increased flexible hours with no core time, extend working hours, increase carry forward limits and number of days in lieu or “Duvet Day” to allow employee to request leave on the day
- Employee Surveys and risk assessments to understand workload demands
- Managerial Training to deal with attendance and stress management
- Discounts for Well-being – Gym memberships, leisure centres or alternative therapy
- On Site Fitness and Well-being - Gym, lunchtime classes e.g. yoga, ti-chi, workshops for stress management/healthy eating/smoking
- Improved links with Health/Occupational Support, Nurse led attendance management system, on site health centre, regular health checks for employees, counsellor services
- More restrictions in sick pay periods.
- Child Care facilities on site
- Investment in telephony and ICT to facilitate remote working

5.3.4 To examine the barriers to implementing a new corporate policy for attendance management and work life balance within Warrington BC.

It is concluded from the research the main barriers are:

- Reluctance to invest in training and managers reluctance to attend re-training not understanding the benefits
- Resistance to use electronic system by some services
- Reliance on managerial input and consistency in approach
- Reluctance of managers to address reason for absence in return to work interviews, discuss attendance in appraisals or address poor attendance via disciplinary process
- Resistance of managers to consider applications for work life balance due to the notion of a negative impact on service delivery and increased managerial demands.

5.3.5 To make recommendations for actions to ensure continuous improvement in attendance management and promotion of work life balance within the authority

Recommendations are outlined in the action plan in chapter 6.

5.4 Conclusions about the Research Question

This section outlines the conclusions reached to the following research question: Assessment of the Effectiveness of Attendance Management in order to improve Work Life Balance within Warrington BC.

The main themes emerging from the research are inconsistent practices by managers, general reluctance of managers to address poor performance and attendance issues, poor communication and understanding of policies. The benefits of health and well-being and work life balance policies in reducing absenteeism have been evidenced and as outlined successful attendance policies combine approaches that prevent illegitimate absence, provide support to those legitimately absent and promote well-being in the workplace.

In order to address high absence levels managerial procedures need to be communicated to line managers and employees, records maintained, reported and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure consistency of approach. The use of trigger points by personnel and standard forms should instigate a consistent approach towards attendance management reviews. Managers need to address any concerns when there is evidence of abuse of policies or patterns in absence, which may also be outside triggers. One of the hallmarks identified through the research being managers often shirk the responsibility of face to face discussions with people they manage therefore failing to address issues such as poor performance, attendance, and the opportunity for employee recognition to address any employee concerns providing support and resolution which may prevent periods of absence.

Effective attendance management requires continuous and coordinated effort from all managers with relevant support and training from personnel and health experts. The research highlighted the importance of a positive promotion of attendance culture and therefore identified the link to well-being and an understanding of employee requirements to encourage flexibility, work life

balance, prevention of illness and promotion of well-being and a return to work policy which concentrates on the ability of the employee to attend work.

Having identified the benefits of positive attendance management and work life balance policies to manage and reduce the level and cost of absence; the research identifies public sector employers in practice have made limited progression due to poor communication and managerial reluctance to embed a wide range of work life balance policies and invest in health and well-being support packages. The consensus of opinion within Warrington BC being absenteeism is an issue within the organisation, which needs to be addressed; with long-term absence regarded as the most disruptive and harder to manage. The research highlighted variations in attitude towards work life balance, with less awareness in terms of policy, inconsistent practice and managerial belief there is no requirement for further flexibility and some reluctance to apply policies in practice.

The research concludes the need for Warrington BC to invest resources to understand causes of absence, to address the growth in absenteeism and apply improved attendance management and work life balance policies in order to increase productivity and efficiency.

5.5 Limitations

The findings from the focus workshops are to some extent limited to the specific nature of Revenue and Benefits, Environmental Management and Children's Social Care; however as front line services they should be representative of the more complex issues faced in absence and work life balance management. Additionally, the findings offer limited insight into the opinions of employees at all levels, due to a higher response level from senior managers for employee questionnaire and Mori Survey. However, the focus groups did provide the opportunity for employee feedback as sessions were held without senior managers in an attempt to overcome potential bias.

In this context, further research would offer greater richness to the data but following comparison with other organisations, it is evident that the conclusions

do present some generalisations and concepts can be considered with a degree of caution.

5.6 Opportunities for Further Research

The following opportunities for further research have been identified in order to ensure continuous improvement in practices.

5.6.1 Further Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups extended to a wider population, to include representatives from other service areas and external organisations. This would facilitate further insight into absence management and work life balance practices, thus enabling further triangulation of data. To identify good practices and areas for further research or pilot reviews.

5.6.2 Cost Benefit Review

The research completed has highlighted a number of financial benefits from reduction in absenteeism and work life balance policies. A detailed cost benefit review needs to be completed following data collection from pilots and then performance monitoring as outlined in appendix 8.5 completed on a regular basis.

Recommendations of how Warrington BC can manage required changes in order to improve absence management and promote work life balance are included within the action plan in chapter 6

6. Recommendations

The chapter will present recommendations within an action plan for the managerial team to consider implementing within Warrington Borough Council.

In implementing this action plan, the Council must continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the recommendations and actions, and where necessary revise the plan to ensure that it is meeting objectives.

No.	Specific Recommendations	Action Officers	Timescale
1	To ensure re-launch of policies and consistency of practices for management, reporting and accuracy of statistical data in future; refresher attendance & stress management and work life balance training sessions be included in management training programmes and Corporate management service away days.	Corporate Personnel Officer	Immediate and reviewed annually
2	A short summary of absence procedures and standard documentation with intranet links for more detailed guidance and main points of contacts be issued to all Managers by e-mail.	Corporate Personnel Officer	Immediate.
3	Electronic Absence System to be rolled out to all managers and training provided. Absence managerial reports need to be improved and made easily accessible to line managers via desktop from the integrated system. Reports should be developed to highlight the frequency of short term trends such as Monday and Friday absence, highlight trigger points and include costing implications to assist management reviews	Corporate Personnel Officer and ICT	To be reviewed quarterly
4	The application of new triggers for attendance review meetings on a rolling 6 month period for absence of over 3 periods or more than 5 days needs to be consistently applied. The option of an automatic trigger via an integrated electronic system to assist managers by highlighting the need for reviews, to be explored for example report developments or e-mail triggers.	Corporate Personnel Officer and ICT	To be reviewed monthly

No.	Specific Recommendations	Action Officers	Timescale
5	Return to work interviews should be carried out and formally recorded for all periods of absence via electronic system on standard forms.	Line Managers	To be reviewed monthly
6	Managers to complete standard forms following attendance reviews; documenting which of the following actions is taken; verbal or written warning, period for review, referral to OHU or formal disciplinary action. Managers guidance covered in training and policy notes and ongoing support from HR.	Line Managers	To be reviewed monthly
7	Review of records completed by HR and incomplete or limited records followed up with relevant line manager.	Corporate Personnel and Line Managers	To be reviewed quarterly
8	Use of the appraisal process to record poor rates of attendance, abuse of absence policies outside triggers, acknowledge and provide recognition for good attendance and provide opportunity for general discussion on health and well-being	Line Managers	To be reviewed at least annually
9	Recognition letter issued to employees for good attendance by Chief Executive and recorded in appraisal by manager.	Corporate Personnel, Line managers and Chief Executive	To be reviewed annually
10	Consideration be given to the need for employees to provide sickness certificate for any period of absence in the 12 months following a formal review instigated by trigger process.	Corporate Personnel Officer	Immediate
11	Consideration be given to the use of positive incentive schemes such as increasing flexi time allowance for employees with no periods of absence on a 12 month rolling programme.	Corporate Personnel Officer	Immediate
12	Consideration be given to introduction of nurse led attendance management system; with health expert logging absence; option for joint procurement of service with regional public sector bodies.	Corporate Personnel Officer	Immediate
13	Re-launch of medicare benefit package for staff and consider option of introducing regular health checks for employees.	Corporate Personnel Officer	Immediate

No.	Specific Recommendations	Action Officers	Timescale
14	Managers need to communicate with Personnel and OHU to ensure appropriate measures are adopted for the well-being of employees on long term absence and appropriate consideration is given to all options in eventually return to work, consideration given to “fit for work” concept what is the employee able to do or home working opportunities.	Line Mangers	Ongoing.
15	Absence data needs to be published on a unit basis and performance indicators calculated and shared with employees via team away days, team meetings, intranet or staff newsletter.	Corporate Personnel and ICT	To be reviewed annually
16	Employee Survey and risk assessments completed to understand well-being concerns including: health & safety and workload demands.	Corporate Personnel	Review every 2-3 years
17	Promotion of Health awareness through use of occupational health and medicare provider in corporate workshops or team away day sessions	Corporate Personnel Officer and Line Mangers	To be reviewed annually
18	Encourage the use of Occupational Health stress management programmes or counsellor services via appraisal review or via guest speaker in team away days.	Corporate Personnel Officer and Line Mangers	To be reviewed annually
19	Promotion of health and well-being through discounts for Council Sports club facilities for staff and encourage usage through service sport events and lunchtime sessions. Discount vouchers from gyms and health spas and promotion of healthy eating by in-house catering provider.	Corporate Personnel Officer Catering and Leisure Services	Ongoing
20	Revise flexible working policy to extend working hours from 7 am to 7pm, increase carry forward limit to 20 hrs and maximum days in lieu in each period to two.	Corporate Personnel Officer	Immediate
21	Review child-care voucher system and consider offering child care facility on site or joint facility with other public sector bodies in Warrington.	Corporate Personnel Officer	To be reviewed annually

No.	Specific Recommendations	Action Officers	Timescale
22	Review of technology to facilitate increased flexible working such as remote ICT access and telephony.	Corporate Personnel Officer and ICT	Reflect in annual budget
23	Hot desks to be made available and regular space utilisation reviews to be completed in order to encourage an increase in remote working for all Council sites and home working	Corporate Personnel Officer and Corporate Property	To be reviewed every six months
24	Re-launch of standard forms for work life balance options and service review panels established with HR to ensure consistent approach.	Corporate Personnel Officer and Senior Management Team	Immediate.
25	All job adverts to state flexible working available and forms to be updated to include section for preference.	Corporate Personnel	Immediate and ongoing
26	<p>Cost Benefit Review completed and the following performance indicators reviewed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Absence cost per FTE ▪ Agency cover and cost per FTE ▪ Recruitment cost per FTE ▪ Retention rate by Grade ▪ Ill health /early retirement number and cost per FTE ▪ Flexible Retirement applications and accepted ▪ Recruitment applications per post ▪ Overtime Costs per FTE ▪ Accommodation space and cost per FTE ▪ Flexible working applications and accepted 	Corporate Personnel Officer and Senior Management Team	To be reviewed every six months

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Appendix 8.1

Warrington Absence Data

Directorate	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008/09
	Working Days Lost per FTE				
Chief Executive	13.14	14.19	5.40	10.62	9.02
Childrens Services	8.80	8.93	8.26	8.17	7.91
Corporate Services	12.53	12.08	11.20	13.14	13.69
Environment Services	13.28	12.18	11.08	14.65	10.11
Community Services	15.31	14.35	14.01	14.37	13.58
TOTAL WBC	10.90	10.61	9.82	10.41	9.72

Review of Absence by Service Area

Service Area	2007-08	2008-09	Directorate Target	Council Target
Social Care Older People	18.73	18.19	12.34	8.9
Mental Health	14.08	14.34	12.34	8.9
Community Services Management	13.03	9.09	12.34	8.9
Housing Protection and Community	12.47	9.08	12.34	8.9
Leisure and Culture	8.89	7.46	12.34	8.9
Children's Social Care and Youth	14.77	12.52	7.66	8.9
Schools	7.33	7.19	7.66	8.9
Business Planning and Resources	10.66	10.39	7.66	8.9
School Improvement and Inclusion	14.45	11.45	7.66	8.9
Community Support Services	6.89	10.38	7.66	8.9
Corporate Services Management	12.12	1.76	9.52	8.9
Legal Services	7.54	10.63	9.52	8.9
Property Services	15.58	18.66	9.52	8.9
Finance and Business Services	12.83	9.85	9.52	8.9
Customer Contact	10.43	13.49	9.52	8.9
HR and Organisational Development	15.17	7.55	9.52	8.9
Environment Services Management	7.46	11.84	10.1	8.9
Regeneration & Development	9.04	8.02	10.1	8.9
Transportation	14.21	10.29	10.1	8.9
Environmental Management	16.64	10.79	10.1	8.9
Chief Executive Management	10.62	9.02	5.22	8.9

Long and Short Term Absence

Directorate	Long Term Absence	Short Term Absence
Chief Executive	51%	49%
Childrens Services	56%	44%
Corporate Services	60%	40%
Environment Services	68%	32%
Community Services	59%	41%
TOTAL WBC	59%	41%

Review by Absence Cause

Causes of Absence	Long Term Absence	Short Term Absence	Total
Stress/Depression	16%	3%	19%
Respiratory	3%	11%	14%
Digestive	4%	6%	10%
Limbs/Joints	7%	2%	9%
Back/Neck	6%	2%	8%
Reproductive	4%	1%	5%
Heart	2%	0%	2%
Headaches	0%	2%	2%
Malignancies	0%	2%	2%
Kidney/Gall Bladder	2%	0%	2%
Skin Problems	0%	1%	1%
Other	15%	11%	26%
	59%	41%	100%

Review of Absence and Age Trends

Age Ranges	Long Term Absence	Short Term Absence	Total
Under 18	0%	1%	1%
18 to 24	1%	2%	3%
25 to 39	12%	15%	27%
40 to 49	18%	11%	29%
50 to 59	21%	10%	31%
60 +	7%	2%	9%
	59%	41%	100%

Review of Absence by Gender

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	%
Female	4,705	3,776	3,269	2,718	3,472	3,220	3,309	2,663	3,277	3,926	4,398	3,957	42,690	74%
Male	1,628	1,220	1,002	1,093	1,268	1,231	1,230	1,070	1,056	1,568	1,681	1,274	15,321	26%
	6,333	4,996	4,271	3,811	4,740	4,451	4,539	3,733	4,333	5,494	6,079	5,231	58,011	100%

Review of Absence by Month

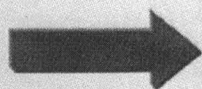
Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
6,333	4,996	4,271	3,811	4,740	4,451	4,539	3,733	4,333	5,494	6,079	5,231	58,011

Appendix 8.2

Flow Chart Procedures

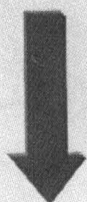
WORKING EXAMPLE OF PROPOSED LONG-TERM ABSENCE PROCEDURE

EMPLOYEE RINGS IN SICK
MUST SPEAK TO MANAGER
(MANAGER WILL CALL BACK IF
NOT THERE TO RECEIVE CALL)



Manager Will:

1. Establish reason for absence
2. Seek indication of likely duration
3. Offer support/initial welfare check
4. Establish when expect contact again
5. Complete and submit absence notification to Staffing/Payroll teams (on first day of absence)
6. Contact HR if:
 - immediately apparent that absence is likely to be long term (e.g. 4 weeks or more)
 - absence is described as stress/anxiety/depression
 - absence due to a musculo-skeletal disorderHR will facilitate immediate assessment of the case for referral of Occupational Health/Employee Support
7. In other circumstances, consider referral at the appropriate timescales:
 - If original prognosis is exceeded
 - If no diagnosis and/or prognosis is available
 - If the employee requests support/intervention
 - In any event after 4 weeks absence
8. Maintain contact with absent employee at appropriate intervals
9. Arrange home visit and/or workplace meetings after 2 weeks absence
10. Continue to seek relevant information and offer support
11. Discuss work-related matters that require attention

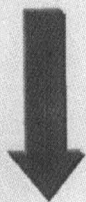


REFERRAL TO OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH/EMPLOYEE SUPPORT

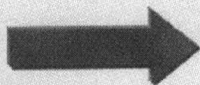


Manager Will (with support from HR):

1. Prior to referral to Occupational Health/Employee Support, discuss referral with employee, ensuring they know:
 - Why they are being referred
 - What to expect, e.g. who they will see, where, the process
 - The information you will submit to Occupational Health/Employee Support
 - The information you will be requesting back
 - What will happen next
2. HR to arrange referral

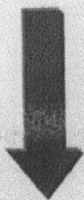


UPON RECEIPT OF
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
REPORT



Manager Will:

1. Arrange absence review meeting, offer employee right to be accompanied
2. Share details of the report, check employee's agreement with content
3. Consider OHU advice with regard to:
 - prognosis for return to work
 - rehabilitation advice
 - suggestions for adjustments and/or possible redeployment
 - opinion regarding disability status
 - proposal for further OH reviews
 - opinion regarding ill health retirement, if relevant
4. Agree support/action needed
5. Agree review period and timing of next meeting
6. Confirm discussions in writing
7. Monitor at regular intervals, maintain contact and support with employee



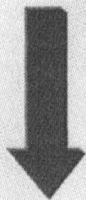
**SUBSEQUENT ABSENCE
REVIEWS**



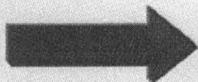
At this point consideration must be given as to whether the manager has the appropriate delegated authority to proceed

Manager Will:

1. Decide the timing and frequency of review meetings, dependent upon circumstances/nature of condition
2. Review the latest medical condition and OHU/specialist advice (including any views regarding ill health retirement)
3. Reconsider prognosis and advice regarding return to work and/or adjustments
4. Formally agree review period and next stages, including notification that continued absence could lead to termination of employment
5. Confirm all discussions in writing



**EMPLOYEE FIT TO RETURN TO
WORK**



Manager Will:

1. Ensure confirmation received by OHU (if relevant)
2. Consider potential options for rehabilitation/return:
 - phased return
 - return to own duties
 - return to own duties, with adjustments
 - redeployment to other duties (trial period)
3. Review and monitor
4. Maintain relevant support measures

OR



**EMPLOYEE NOT FIT TO RETURN
TO WORK**



Manager Will:

1. Convene formal hearing with relevant Chief Officer, Strategic Director or Head of Service (or appropriately delegated representative)
2. Allow employee right to be represented and give adequate written notice (including outline reasons for hearing)
3. Review of case, including consideration of:
 - duration of absence
 - nature of illness and treatment received and planned
 - prognosis for full recovery
 - impact on service of prolonged period of absence
 - reasonable adjustments (particularly if DDA)
 - redeployment options
 - whether ill health retirement is supported by OHU and independent doctor (and the necessary documentation has been completed)
4. If dismissal decided, confirm in writing, specifying whether:
 - Capability dismissal
 - Ill health retirementand give right of appeal

WORKING EXAMPLE OF PROPOSED SHORT-TERM ABSENCE PROCEDURE

EMPLOYEE RINGS IN SICK
MUST SPEAK TO MANAGER
(MANAGER WILL CALL BACK IF
NOT THERE TO RECEIVE CALL)

Manager Will:

1. Establish reason for absence
2. Seek indication of likely duration
3. Offer support/initial welfare check
4. Establish when expect contact again
5. Contact HR if absence related to stress/anxiety/depression, or musculo-skeletal
6. Complete and submit absence notification to Staffing/Payroll teams (on first day of absence)
7. Maintain contact with absent employee at appropriate intervals
8. Continue to seek relevant information and offer support

EMPLOYEE RETURNS TO WORK

Manager Will:

1. Arrange Return to Work Interview at suitable venue no later than 2 days from return
2. Prepare for Return to Work Interview by obtaining attendance record for past 12 months (12 months preceding first day of absence)
3. Consider in advance whether trigger points have been hit over past 12 months:
 - 10 or more days
 - 4 or more occasions
4. Proceed to Return to Work interview

RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEW

Manager Will:

1. Enquire about health and any treatment/advice received
2. Offer support, e.g. OH, Employee Support, Health and Safety Assessment
3. Explore any other underlying issues, and any appropriate further action
4. If good attendance, acknowledge
5. If employee is close to trigger point, remind of Council policy and need for ongoing monitoring. Consider holding a welfare meeting.
6. If employee has hit trigger point, advise of the need for an attendance review meeting

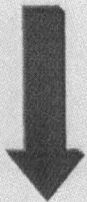
At this point consideration must be given as to whether the manager has the appropriate delegated authority to proceed

ATTENDANCE REVIEW MEETING

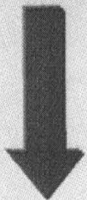
Manager Will:

1. Formally notify employee of date/time of meeting and right to be accompanied
2. Consider:
 - Underlying issues
 - Possible work-related causes/contributors
 - Occupational Health opinion, and/or whether further OH advice needed
 - Other support available
3. If satisfied of reasons for absence and manager not concerned regarding general attendance, confirm that no formal action will be taken, but that attendance will continue to be monitored
4. If concerned regarding employee's attendance, establish review period and advise of potential future actions
5. If not satisfied that absence was for genuine medical reasons, consider referral to other procedures
6. Arrange any agreed support (as per 2 above)
7. Document the meeting and continually monitor over review period

ATTENDANCE FAILS TO IMPROVE



ATTENDANCE CONTINUES TO
CAUSE CONCERN



CONSIDERATION OF DISMISSAL

Manager Will:

1. Convene further attendance review meeting, allowing employee to be accompanied
2. Review attendance since last meeting, and explore reasons
3. Consider the need for further advice/interventions, e.g. OHU, employee support, health and safety
4. Consider appropriateness of formal warning
5. If warning not appropriate, establish further review period, advise of potential consequences of failure to improve attendance and continue monitoring
6. If appropriate, issue first formal warning, giving review period and potential consequences of failure to improve attendance
7. Keep a written record of discussions

Manager Will:

1. Allow up to two formal warnings, followed by final warning, prior to consideration of dismissal
2. All warnings must include the right to appeal

At any stage of considering formal warnings, consideration must be given as to whether the manager has the appropriate delegated authority to proceed

Manager Will:

1. Convene formal hearing with relevant Chief Officer, Strategic Director or Head of Service (or appropriately delegated representative)
2. Allow employee right to be represented and give adequate written notice (including outline of reasons for hearing)
3. Review case, including consideration of:
 - underlying issues
 - work related causes/contributors
 - OHU opinion and other support given
 - full consideration of attendance record and previous attendance review meetings/warnings
4. If dismissal decided, confirm in writing and give right of appeal

Appendix 8.3

FLEXIBLE WORKING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

When considering flexible working practices, both the employee when making an application, and the line manager in considering the application should give full attention to the suitability of the job role to be undertaken on a flexible working basis.

It is important that the assessment challenges preconceived notions of how tasks can be carried out or a service can be delivered. In so doing the following issues should be taken into account:

- The duties and responsibilities involved in the job role;
- Any special requirements, including statutory requirements;
- Aspects of work that need to be done in a team environment;
- Aspects of work that need to be done at particular times of the day/year;
- Level and quality of service delivery;
- Current and previous working arrangements;
- Possible impact on other team members and the team dynamics;
- Issues of confidentiality and data protection;
- Requirement for the postholder to attend the office at certain times;
- Requirements for face-to-face or personal contact;
- Requirements for direct supervision;
- Requirements for IT and other resources;
- Any extraordinary or additional costs involved or any savings or gains;
- Pursuit of longer term, organisational aims and objectives.
- Health, safety and welfare issues

It is important to note that requests for flexible working practice can only be refused on:

one or more of the following business case related grounds:

- the burden of additional costs
- detrimental effect on the ability to meet customer needs and demands
- detrimental impact on the quality of service delivery
- the impact on performance of the employee, team and the work of the section
- the inability to reorganise work amongst employees
- the inability to recruit additional employees
- insufficiency of work during the periods the employee wishes to work
- planned structural changes
- existing working arrangements within the team

A decision to refuse an application for flexible working should only be taken after consultation with Human Resources.

Appendix 8.4

Summary of Interviews held with the Head of Human Resources and Corporate Director

What are the perceived absence problems within the organisation?

Significant improvements have been made in recent years to reduce short term sickness. A new monitoring system has been introduced and continues to be rolled out therefore due to improved monitoring it can be argued to some extent statistics have increased as a result of better record keeping.

Standard of return to work interviews completed and recorded on the system is generally good but there is a consistency issue which needs to be addressed via training.

Short term absence – there is a trend of high absence in social care and highways depot; this can be linked to several factors in recent years such as nature of job exposure to health risks in social care, equal pay deal (lead to changes in working patterns, overtime rules and pay) and shift rota allocation traditionally top down approach leading to employees reporting as sick due to lack of flexibility. Need to always balance health and safety risk; as a person with genuine illness (even minor cold) working with elderly or children needs a different approach to an office based role.

Most significant issue is the varying degree of action taken to deal with long term sickness/absence; cultural change needed to improve communication and support networks. Managers do not always keep in close contact and as time passes the line of communication becomes more difficult. The role of HR and the manager in this process is often confused as HR provide support and guidance, but direct line manager or manager within service area should provide first point of contact.

Poor reporting of absence to elected members, general management consensus needed for new strategy and reporting process to senior management board and members. Need to more closely link attendance, capability and workforce planning.

Appendix 8.4

What areas do you propose to focus on in next twelve months?

It is clear that the Council needs focused objectives over the next 12 months to achieve a greater flexibility in our workforce, cost savings and service improvement and efficiency. The main factors identified being the need for:

- Greater flexibility of the workforce
- Link Workforce Planning and flexible working to achieve service improvement and efficiency.

The possibilities of flexible working are endless but to achieve Council objectives we need to focus on the following key areas.

- Home working (partial and full)
- 'Hot desking' arrangements in new office set ups
- Flexible working hours

The enhancements expected to be made in the next 12 months are:

- To confirm and enhance the current home working arrangement where appropriate across all Directorates
- To increase the number of employees who have access to flexible working hours eg compressed working week, 9 day fortnight etc
- To provide 'hot desking' arrangements where appropriate in new offices to maximise the use of our office provision

For the successful delivery of this project a number of resources are required following an 'invest to save' strategy; that should pay back over the medium term.

The following costs identified:

- Fixed term Project Officer to support implementation
- The additional cost of laptops over desktop pc's
- Implementation to data security measures
- Increase in network capacity
- Training for Line Managers
- Development of Health and Safety self assessment and advice
- Additional equipment for home working where necessary i.e. desks etc

Appendix 8.4

Some of the above are already in place within the Council but not consistent; this proposal would see a culture change in the way the Council addresses flexible working and would lead to efficiency savings. A communication plan will be needed to ensure consistent approach in implementation.

People Strategy focus on:

- reward packages,
- organisational development – strategic vision, service aims and progression opportunities
- personal performance review process – capability/absence
- people development – training opportunities / equality
- work force planning - recruitment/retention and release

What would you consider to be a priority in the next three years to manage and reduce absence levels?

- Developed and embedded People Strategy
- Structure of HR department use of ‘front line’ HR Officers who promote and advise Managers on employment practices.
- Consistency of management practices: use of the Training and Development function to train third tier Managers to support them in implementing new working practices and ensure consistent rollout.
- IT developments : the Council already has staff working from home and limited IT infrastructure to support them, however as volumes increase those resources will need to be improved. Particularly in regard to specialist system support (interface and remote access)

Long term vision being:

- To continue the increase in the number of employees who have access to flexible working hours e.g. compressed working week, 9 day fortnight etc
- To enhance our ICT provision to facilitate flexible working
- Fair practice across directorates reason neutral not just family friendly need to review business case and individual choice.

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- Personal Choice and focus on team working – shift rota consultation worked in number of pilot areas
- Financial savings achieved after initial invest to save nature of project
- Improved Service delivery and more effective organisation
- Improved Staff Morale
- Reduced Absence levels

What do you feel would be the benefits of introducing work life balance policies?

There are huge benefits to the organisation and the community if flexible working is implemented successfully. These include:

- A more motivated and productive workforce
- Increased response to recruitment / retention of employees
- Reduced accommodation costs
- Reduced energy consumption for Council Offices
- Reduced transport congestion of Warrington's roads
- Increased flexibility in terms of service delivery

Do you consider Work life balance to be of most benefit to the organisation or the employee?

Both – but need to deliver service to public therefore need of organisation must always be a priority

Is work life balance a priority for Senior Management Board

Yes - Senior Officer support secured for proposed work life balance project, but elected members support and approve is also vital to implement as an investment to save project. Need to build in a review mechanism to ensure we are on track to meet our objectives and make any necessary adjustments to our approach.

What does Work life balance need to deliver in terms of your own view/ role?

A more effective and efficient organisation; improved morale and equality of opportunities for all staff.

Appendix 8.4

Summary of Interviews held with Service Managers

- **Is absenteeism an issue in your service area?**

Service managers stated absenteeism was or had been an issue within their service area. When asked how they would currently rate the level of absenteeism compared to other areas of the council and national statistics answers varied; whilst a number were aware of current performance levels within their own team and the Council, a few were surprised at the level of absence in some service areas.

- **Is this primarily short or long term absences?**

Long term absence was regarded as the most disruptive in terms of team workload and performance statistics but in most cases this was considered to be genuine absence which needed to be managed through regular contact and use of OHU. To ensure awareness of issues and potential timescale of absence, in order to take appropriate action for temporary cover, acting up and continual managerial and health unit support. Most managers felt it was harder to address the level of short term absence in teams and a number of managers stated they had experienced cases of abuse when they had felt absence had not been genuine or had been extended longer than required, but they admitted the level of challenge in return to work interviews is often weak.

- **How does this impact on the management of your team?**

- Knowledge gaps, risks of mistakes and failure to deliver
- Deadlines being missed or late delivery
- Increased workload for team members and manager
- Increased Stress within team or for some individuals
- Low level of morale within team
- Risk of further absence within team
- Anger if management of absence is not challenged or seen as unfair/inconsistent
- Opportunity for career progression and upgrade for an individual within the team

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- **What information do you currently use to monitor and manage staff absence and time?**

Systems used by managers varied between services from manual records to electronic records. Whilst over half of managers stated they now used the new electronic system for management of absence it became evident there was clearly inconsistency in approach for the timing of recording absence and return to work interviews and the level of detail recorded. Whilst some managers frequently checked team time recording records for accuracy, the majority due to own workload and trust within team stated they did not or rarely reviewed time recording records.

- **Do the current working hours of the department match operational need?**

Responses varied as a number of managers felt the current working hours offered an acceptable level of flexibility and matched service delivery requirements. However, managers in front line services highlighted the need for changes in working patterns as requests for service delivery have altered and therefore more flexible working could provide the solution to offering a new level of service and improved service delivery to customers. For example Customer Contact Centre, Children Centres, Social Care, Highways Services, Leisure and Library Service each have very different service delivery requirements which have also altered significantly in recent years. Whilst traditional working fixed contract hours of 9am to 5pm may need to be applied in some services to ensure delivery in peak periods, rota and shift working has also been essential as services have moved to longer delivery hours and weekend working. The cost of overtime working has reduced as more services have adopted flexible working, providing budget for additional resource.

- **How flexible have the team demonstrated they are willing to be - what is the current working patterns of the team including toil and overtime?**

Whilst a number of managers stated their team were flexible and responded to workload peaks and therefore a more flexible style of management was adopted with goodwill on both sides. The level of abuse within some teams

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and inflexible approach of some individuals were also highlighted and therefore the need for more direct management and application of strict policies. In some services overtime was never agreed and even weekend working had to be included in toil. Whilst other managers stated due to workload demands or absence cover the service had a high overtime and toil level.

- **Do you have the resources to be more flexible in working patterns?**

The following concerns were expressed:

- Insufficient staffing resources and budget concerns
- Fear loss of control of team working hours and harder to manage therefore result in lower productivity
- Conflicts within team may increase
- Fear increase managerial workloads and resentment as would be required to judge value of requests
- Concern Work life balance and flexible policies would be seen as another initiative which is inconsistently applied or not followed through in practice as unable to deliver.

- **How does flexible working currently work in your service area?**

The disparity which was most evident related to carry forward of additional flexi, the policy on overtime and action taken for excess negative hours. Home working is not encouraged by many managers due to fear of loss of control and productivity reduction. A number of service managers stated whilst workload requirements could provide the opportunity for home working the option was not actively encouraged as it was harder to manage and treatment of team members would have to be inconsistent as some individuals and roles could never be considered and this would increase employee resentment.

- **Are there any recruitment and retention issues in your service area?**

Service managers recognised recruitment and retention issues but the majority felt the organisation flexible working offer was competitive. Recruitment and retention was more difficult due to pay levels and budget pressures; a number of

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managers felt more flexible work life balance policies could therefore be attractive if salaries were viewed to be less competitive. It was acknowledged in current climate it may be easier to recruit in some fields subject to restricted budget and structure reviews but retention would be hard when economic conditions improve.

- **What would you like work life balance to deliver in terms of own role and for the team?**

- Improved staff morale
- Commitment to the organisation
- Improved Service delivery and productivity
- Speaking highly of the organisation to friends/family/public
- Stress reduction improved health of workforce
- Better family/home and work life
- Improved team spirit
- Balance commitments resulting in improved concentration when in work
- Team and Individuals increased feeling of being valued
- Positive outlook
- Reduction in absence levels, disciplinary procedures, stress and ill health retirements
- Increased retention and improved response to recruitment

Appendix 8.5

Employer Questionnaire

Work Life Balance and Absence Management

Organisation

Department

Date

Please complete the following questions by selecting your response from the drop down fields, ranking them in order of importance and by adding as much information as possible under the field entitled “any other comments”.

All information will remain confidential

A - Policies and Communication

Q1) Have you a written policy on absence management?

Yes - consistent practice across organisation

Q2) Have you a written policy on work life balance?

Yes - consistent practice across organisation

Q3) How are policies communicated to employees?

Intranet

Do you feel communication of the policies is good within your organisation?

Yes - consistent practice across organisation

B - Absence Management

Q4) Does the Absence policy distinguish between the handling of short term and long term absence?

Yes

Q5) Have you established specific criteria to determine when disciplinary action is taken?

Yes

On what basis is the criteria set?

Number of consecutive days of absence

Other

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Employer Questionnaire

Q6) What is the current rate of absence in the organisation – number of days lost per FTE?

0-4 DAYS

Q7) What is the organisation's performance target for number of days lost per FTE ?

0-4 DAYS

Q8) Is cost of absence calculated by the organisation?

Yes

Q9) Is absence monitoring featured in the appraisal process?

Yes

Q10) How would you rate your absence monitoring training programme?

Excellent

Q11) What measures are in place for contact with employees during long periods of absence? (Mark one or more)

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Regular Telephone Contact | Yes |
| 2. Home Visits by Manager | Yes |
| 3. Referral to Occupational Health Unit | Yes |
| 4. Other | |

Q12) Do you have an Occupation Health Unit (OHU)?

Yes - Internal

Q13) What are the options adopted for return to work arrangements? (Mark one or more)

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Return to Work Interviews | Yes |
| 2. Provisional Light Duties | Yes |
| 3. Adjusted Hours | Yes |
| 4. Rehabilitation Services | Yes |
| 5. Other | |

Appendix 8.5

Employer Questionnaire

Q14) Please rank the following concerns for line managers?

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Absence levels | Very High |
| 2. Short term absence | Very High |
| 3. Long term absence | Very High |
| 4. Cost implications of absence | Very High |
| 5. Workload cover | Very High |
| 6. Consistency of absence policy between Departments | Very High |
| 7. Recording of absence data | Very High |
| 8. Adequacy of absence data/reports | Very High |
| 9. Absence management training | Very High |
| 10. Other | |

Q15) Do you offer any positive incentives for low absenteeism?

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. Recognition in Appraisal | Yes - important to recognise |
| 2. Formal Recognition Letter from Director | Yes - important to recognise |
| 3. Reward Vouchers | Yes - important to recognise |
| 4. Bonus Payment | Yes - important to recognise |
| 5. Extra Annual Leave | Yes - important to recognise |
| 6. Extra Flexible Working Hours | Yes - important to recognise |
| Any other Comments | |

C - Work Life Balance

Q16) Which of the following work life balance practices have you in place?

- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. Job Share | Yes |
| 2. Flexi Time | Yes |
| 3. Career Break | Yes |
| 4. Reduced Hours | Yes |
| 5. Flexible Retirement | Yes |

Q17) Do you think there is there enough scope within current policies for work life balance and flexible working?

Yes

Please list any recommendations in the field below and if you answered No above please explain response.

Appendix 8.5

Employer Questionnaire

Q18) Do current policies restrict service delivery?

Yes

Please provide reasons in the field below.

Q19) Please rank the following potential benefits of Work life balance practices?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Increased employee morale | Significant Benefit |
| 2. Reduction in Absenteeism | Significant Benefit |
| 3. Reduced Stress Levels | Significant Benefit |
| 4. Increased retention of employees | Significant Benefit |
| 5. Cost Savings | Significant Benefit |
| 6. Increased appeal for recruitment | Significant Benefit |

Q20) Please rank the following concerns for line managers?

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Loss of control of team working hours | Very High |
| 2. Personal involvement in role judgement | Very High |
| 3. Team spirit / morale | Very High |
| 4. Cost implications | Very High |
| 6. Workload cover not match operational need | Very High |
| 6. Consistency of policy between Departments | Very High |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire; please select;

- File
- Save
- Send to – Original Sender / Mail recipient **as attachment**
- Mail recipient and return to

Or print off a hard copy and return it to me by post

Ceri Taylor

Work Life Balance and Absence Management

Organisation **Department**
Date

Please complete the following questions by selecting your response from the drop down fields, ranking them in order of importance and by adding as much information as possible under the field entitled “any other comments”.

All information will remain confidential

A - Policies and Communication

Q1) Have you seen a written policy on absence management?

Yes - consistent practice across organisation

Q2) Have you seen any written policy on work life balance?

Yes - consistent practice across organisation

Q3) Do you feel communication of the policies is good within the organisation?

Yes

How would you prefer to be communicated with regard to policies?

Intranet

Please list any other comments in the field below.

B - Absence Management

Q4) Do you think there is a level of high absenteeism within the organisation?

Yes

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Employee Questionnaire

Q5) Does absence monitoring or wellbeing featured in your appraisal process?

Yes

Q6) How would you rate the following measures for long term absence management?

1. Regular Telephone Contact Very High

2. Home Visits by Manager Very High

3. Referral to Occupational Health Unit Very High

Any other Comments

Q7) How would you rate the following measures for return to work arrangements?

1. Return to Work Interviews Very High

2. Provisional Light Duties Very High

3. Adjusted Hours Very High

4. Rehabilitation Services Very High

Any other Comments

Q8) How would you rate the following measures for positive incentives for low absenteeism?

1. Recognition in Appraisal Not recommended action

2. Formal Recognition Letter from Director Not recommended action

3. Reward Vouchers Not recommended action

4. Bonus Payment Not recommended action

5. Extra Annual Leave Not recommended action

6. Extra Flexible Working Hours Not recommended action

Any other Comments

C - Work Life Balance

Q9) Which of the following work life balance practices are currently in place within WBC?

1. Job Share Yes

2. Flexi Time Yes

3. Career Break Yes

4. Reduced Hours Yes

5. Flexible Retirement Yes

Appendix 8.5

Employee Questionnaire

Q10) Do you think there is there enough scope within current policies for work life balance and flexible working?

Yes

Please list any recommendations in the field below and if you answered No above please explain response.

Q11) Do you feel current policies restrict service delivery?

Yes

Any other comments:

Q12) How would you rate the following Work life balance practices?

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Job Share | Very High |
| 2. Flexi Time | Very High |
| 3. Term Time Only | Very High |
| 4. Career Break | Very High |
| 5. Reduced Hours | Very High |
| 6. Homeworking | Very High |
| 7. Hot Desking | Very High |
| 8. Holiday Purchase | Very High |
| 9. Flexible Retirement | Very High |

Q13) Please rank the following potential benefits of Work life balance practices?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Increased employee morale | Significant Benefit |
| 2. Reduction in Absenteeism | Significant Benefit |
| 3. Reduced Stress Levels | Significant Benefit |
| 4. Increased retention of employees | Significant Benefit |
| 5. Cost Savings | Significant Benefit |
| 6. Increased appeal for recruitment | Significant Benefit |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire; please select;

- File
- Save
- Send to – Original Sender / Mail recipient **as attachment**
- Mail recipient and return to

Or print off a hard copy and return it to me by post

Ceri Taylor -

Appendix 8.6

Performance measures identified to review the success of pilot schemes.

Measures	Data Calculation	Pilot Review
Improvement in Attendance Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Days Lost per FTE on a corporate and service level 	Total Benchmark 2008/09 9.72 days per FTE Pilot Review Areas all reduced (Children's Social Care 12.52, Environmental Management 10.79 and Finance Management Revenue & Benefits 9.85)
Decrease in Self Certification/Short-term absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short Term Absence Levels as a percentage of total absence on a corporate and service level Short term absence Working days Lost per FTE on a corporate and service level 	Total Benchmark 2008/09 41% of total absence Pilot Review Areas (Childrens Services 44% and Childrens Social Care 38%, Environment 32% and Environmental Management 27%)
Reduction in Special Leave/ appointment requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of special leave requests per FTE on a corporate and service level 	No reported Records
Employee Requests for Home working IT access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of home working requests per FTE on a corporate and service level Number of home working requests approved per FTE on a corporate and service level 	No reported Records but IT advised increase requests for managerial access and employee access in pilot areas
Number of staff taking career breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of career break requests approved per FTE on a corporate and service level 	No reported Records
Number of job share within a team or workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of job share requests approved per FTE on a corporate and service level Number of Job Share employees as a percentage of total workforce on a corporate and service level 	No reported Records but personnel advised no significant increase

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Measures	Data Calculation	Pilot Review
Number of Flexible Working requests received and accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Flexible Working requests per FTE on a corporate and service level Number of Flexible Working requests approved per FTE on a corporate and service level 	No reported Records
Staff Retention Rates by grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Leavers by grade as a percentage of total FTE on Corporate and Service Level Average Length of Service on Leaving 	Total Benchmark 2008/09 Turnover Rate 7.28% Pilot Review Areas (Children's Social Care 10.24%, Environmental Management 0 and Finance Management Revenue and Benefits 6.98%)
Reduction in ill health/early retirement	Number of ill health / early retirements as a percentage of Total FTE on Corporate and Service level	Total Benchmark 2008/09 ill health 10 FTE and early 12 FTE Pilot Review Areas (Children's Social Care 1FTE ill health and 1 FTE early retirement)

Cost Benefit Performance Measures

Measures	Data Calculation
Reduction in agency cover due to long term absence	Number of agency Staff per FTE on Corporate and Service level
Reduction in recruitment costs due to retention	Cost of Recruitment per FTE on Corporate and Service level
Reduction in Ill Health Costs	Cost of ill health per FTE on Corporate and Service level
Reduction in Early Retirement Costs	Cost of Early Retirement per FTE on Corporate and Service level
Benefit of Flexible Retirement and Succession planning	Hard to measure will link to reduction in agency costs

Appendix 8.6

Measures	Data Calculation
Increased Recruitment response	Number of Responses per advert on a Corporate and Service level
Increased Productive Time due to staff morale and lower short term absence	Various Performance Statistics within Service areas
Reduction in Overtime Costs due to staff cover period	Cost of Overtime per FTE on Corporate and Service level
Improved service delivery and reduction in errors	Number of errors identified on error Reports Service Benchmarking Results
Reduction in Accommodation Costs through increased space utilisation due to flexible working arrangements	Corporate Accommodation Recharge per FTE on a service and corporate level

These costs need to be offset against implementation costs:

- Human Resource advice, guidance and support time
- Managerial Training Workshops
- Communication and Policy Publication
- Performance monitoring system
- IT development costs for Home Working
- Hot Desking booking system
- Telephony System Upgrade